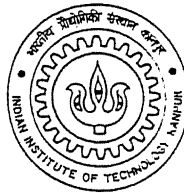


From Rightful Doing to Worthy Living: A Virtue-theoretic Account of Moral Personhood

*A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY*

by

Kumar Neeraj Sachdev



to the

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India
June, 1998

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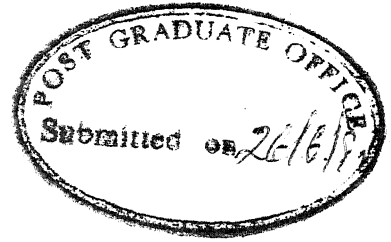
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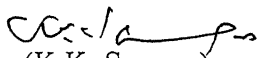
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ABSTRACT

*We make an attempt in the thesis to explore the intricate relationship between morality and life. We argue that the liberal moral theory is inadequate, both structurally and constitutively, to accommodate the idea of moral personhood. Moral personhood is not only an essential part of the notion of a person, rather it is constitutive of a person whose life is structured by narrative unity and set to the attainment of a worthy human life. In the liberal framework, the moral life of a person cannot be a **comprehensive** life, because the discrete life-episodes in which particular moral situations, or situations of moral obligation, are said to arise, do not add up to a life in the comprehensive sense. The liberal theory forces us to accept the schizophrenic fragmentation of human life into moral and non-moral domains. Against this we contend that a satisfactory theory of moral personhood must show the moral life of a person integrated into the person's overall life woven into the fabric of a single narrative.*

*We develop a virtue-theoretic account of moral personhood, which is shaped by the central idea of enduring moral striving and the related idea of a moral life forming a teleologically structured narrative unity. The thrust of the theory is that the moral life is not just a **part** of the life of a person, howsoever, significant the part may be deemed to be. Rather, the **moral** life is what it **means** for a total life to be significant. Instead of the morality of self-interest founded upon ego-centric rationality, we argue for the opposite view that the truly moral person strives for the attainment of selflessness.*

SYNOPSIS

The liberal tradition in Modern Moral Philosophy which is generally known in terms of contractarianism, utilitarianism and Kantianism, projects the central concern of morality to be that of acting rightly. Moral personhood in this approach is a matter of the agent's doing an act in accordance with certain general moral principles. One might characterize this approach as the "action-centered" view.

Against the action-centered view, the present thesis argues for what might be characterized as the "person-centered" view. In this view morality is about how a person engages in qualitative self-transformation and becomes a worthy human being. It is not how the agent acts, but what kind of person the agent is, that is central to the moral question.

The current scenario requires that one sets the central moral question in a larger perspective, that is, "how should one live (a worthwhile human life)?" as against setting it in a narrow perspective, that is, "what ought I to do (in a particular moral situation)?" For, in the long run, the former alternative would enable us to appreciate the depth of the relationship between morality and life.

In view of these considerations, we develop the thesis in two stages. First, we criticize the various strands of liberal individualism that are deeply entrenched in Modern Moral Philosophy. Second, we argue for an alternative position through an account of moral personhood, which avoids the pitfalls of modern moral theory.

In the First Part, we make an attempt to examine the account of moral personhood that underlies the thoughts of the major representatives of liberal moral theory. We begin with discussing the salient thinkers in the liberal tradition of Modern Moral Philosophy and then go on to discuss the contemporary thinkers of this tradition. Chapter One begins with the early modern period, where we discuss the contractarianism of Thomas Hobbes which deeply influences contemporary moral thinking. He describes individuals as seekers of self-advantage who turn out in a contract bound society to be mutually disinterested beings.

After discussing the contractarian views represented by Hobbes, we discuss the utilitarian tradition advocated by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. There, in particular, we argue that Mill does not succeed in improving upon Bentham's position, because it seems that Mill never goes beyond Bentham's hedonistic psychology. And in the process, he too conceives of a moral person in the homogeneous medium where a plain calculation of desires is the criterion of moral decision making. Subsequently, we evaluate Immanuel Kant's position that forcefully argues

in favor of the distinct identity of the moral person. We argue that his distinction between the intelligible world (a world of reason) and the sensible world (a world of inclinations) creates a sense of mental hierarchy and subordination which never allows the person to have integral moral experience.

In Chapter Two, we discuss Gauthier's "Minimax Individualism" which represents a continuation of Hobbes's contractarianism. Gauthier's account of a moral person is that of a person who interacts only with equals for mutual benefit. Like Hobbes, morality for Gauthier is an artifice which has authority only in so far as it ensures successful pursuit of self-interest.

We then discuss R.M. Hare's universal prescriptivism, a position that endorses the view that the individual has the freedom to exercise his to satisfy his personal preferences. This discussion is followed by an examination of John Rawls's deontological liberalism. This version of liberalism is criticized for its asocial characterization of the human individual.

In sum, the main thrust of moral thinking in the liberal individualist tradition seems to be that the individual moral agent himself shoulders the final burden of making a moral decision - a decision that issues from his pure will. The crux of the moral matter, becomes the

following question for the individual agent: "what ought I to do?" Focusing on this question leads us to regard the key formulation of the problem of morality as that, ultimately, the will of the individual agent is to be allowed to exercise its decision-making power in independence of any qualitative criteria. For the will of the liberal individual is primarily detached from the encumbrances of tradition and socially transmitted criteria of moral evaluation.

Given this theoretical turn towards individualism, the pursuit of an end means the exercise of freedom of choice guided by one's own interests or ego-centric rationality. This picture of social organization, constituted of self-interested or mutually disinterested individuals pursuing their self-chosen ends is painted in the history of modern liberalism. Such mutually disinterested, or essentially self-interested beings enter into social engagement from the outside, as it were, and live with one another only because of individual expediency and convenience.

In Chapter Three, we prepare the ground for an account of morality that befits the moral potentiality of the human individual. In preparing this ground, we reformulate the central moral question as "how should one live?" rather than "what ought I to do?" This leads us into the Second Part of the thesis. The purpose of this reformulation is to emphasize the point that human beings *strive* to become moral persons. The life of a moral person is conceived of as a continuous, integral and

self-conscious effort to live a worthwhile life.

It is in this vein that we describe, in Chapter Four, the conditions of moral personhood. The central contention is that the life of a moral agent, that consists of an intermittent series of right doings, punctuated by so many non-moral doings, never amounts to a worthwhile life in the sense elucidated in the previous chapter. For this sense of a worthwhile life involves the idea of seamless striving for moral development. The attainment of moral personhood involves becoming a value-sensitive rational being occupying the inter-subjective space of personal reciprocity. This notion of moral personhood involves those constitutive conditions that make a person a fit subject of moral life. These conditions are explained in terms of features such as personal consciousness, value-laden character of consciousness, and the complex attitudinal fabric into which personhood itself is woven.

Finally, in Chapter Five, we recapitulate the limitations of liberal moral theory so as to highlight its restrictive minimalist stance. The minimalist stance is eliminative of the very idea of a moral life conceived of as a worthwhile life. The composition of a worthwhile life is that of a narrative unity, and the narrative of such a life is directed towards a valued end. This valued end is the attainment of a kind of inner transparency that is uniquely necessary to the full realization of moral personhood. It is the end of selflessness, or egolessness.

The thesis highlights the supreme significance of the attainment of inner transparency for the full realization of moral personhood. No person is truly moral until freed of every shred of selfishness. And since selflessness is a spiritual virtue, morality is ultimately spiritual. To overlook this supra-rational dimension of moral life is to undermine the very essence of morality.

To my little companion Hitesh

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(Kumar Neeraj Sachdev)

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Introduction

Traditionally, ethics has been conceived of as the study of what constitutes the right or virtuous conduct for living a worthwhile human life. The idea of a worthwhile human life has generally been explained in terms of a telos of human life. However, the practical concern of ethics in its contemporary formulation is unhinged from its traditional moorings. In the traditional ethics the question, "what would be the right thing for me to do?" is sought to be answered in terms of a conception of an ideal life, which in turn is articulated in terms of certain cardinal virtues. But in the modern ethics this question is treated independently of the idea of a morally good life. The question assumes an autonomy, such that reason itself, independently of any conception of an ideal life, is to provide an answer to it. Further, unlike the traditional stress on the idea of an overall good life, the modern ethical concern is with life taken as consisting in bits and pieces of individual decisions and actions.

Although the modern moral philosophers like their traditional counterparts are concerned with the distinction between what is morally right or wrong, what is morally good and evil, their treatment of these notions is significantly different from the traditional treatment. This

difference is mainly on account of the role and place of virtues in their respective theoretical frameworks. Whereas in the traditional or classical moral philosophy virtues occupy the central place, in the modern moral philosophy they become subsidiary to a universal principle of conduct. The centrality of virtues sharply brings into moral focus the unity and the quality of human life as such. The emphasis on a universal principle of conduct, however, shifts the focus to the discrete human acts.

The classical or traditional standpoint is based on a rational account of the good human life. It identifies the good life with the virtuous life. Virtues are conceived as human excellencies. The good life is, therefore, the life of excellence. The Greek word for excellence is *arete*, which customarily gets translated as virtue. Unlike the modern conception, which narrowly defines virtues as "moral" excellencies such as sexual chastity, in the classical understanding the virtues are regarded excellencies of character or mind. They are viewed as objective goods. These objective goods are of worth not only to the virtue-bearer but to others as well. For example, the courage of a courageous man assists others, just as it strengthens his pursuit of ends.

Furthermore, the manifestation of a virtue is understood to be an actualization of what was there in a person in the form of a potentiality. That is to say, to be a human being is to be capable of manifesting virtues. The problem of moral development of a person is the problem of discovering those conditions which enable him to actualize qualities that

originally reside in him as potentialities. However, such qualities do not get manifested in a discrete manner, rather they are manifested in accordance with a certain conception of *a complete end of human life*. T.H. Irwin, while elaborating this point, contends:

To organize our lives around a complete end is to introduce some structure into our lives and our ends. If we refused to look at our lives in this way, we would be failing to see the implications of some facts about our ends and our attitudes to them.¹

The point of contention here is that we do not merely make a list of different ends, rather we form a perspective with regard to ends, that is, whether we prefer A to B or B to a combination of A and C. Such a perspectival view involves weighing of ends. We assign the relative weight to ends in the context of a conception of our life as a whole. In the absence of a conception of a "complete end" we cannot maintain a coherent link between different ends while making decisions in regard to them. Thus, all virtuous qualities or dispositions and virtuous actions are organized around some conception of life as a whole with a view to fit together different ends. Precisely because of this reason Stoics identify happiness with "living coherently."² And to say that we live coherently means that we have found a conception of life around which different ends fit together in some rational structure.

¹ "Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy", p. 41. [Full publication details are given for all references in the Bibliography.]

² *Ibid.*

In this sense the concern of ethics envelops the *whole* of human life unlike the modern concern with the "moral life" conceived in acutely restrictive terms. The modern moral theory usually makes a twofold classification of actions: morally right or wrong actions on the one hand and morally indifferent actions on the other. This is associated with a distinction between moral and non-moral situations. But from the point of view of the classical ethics this is a spurious distinction. Nothing in human experience is viewed to be without moral significance. *Moral situation* is pervasive of the entire life of a person. Therefore, "individuals are afforded no non-moral domain of refuge, and no human institution, practice, or discipline can claim exemption from morality's ultimate concern - the good life for human beings."³

For Greeks in general and Aristotle in particular, the attainment of the good life is the telos or purpose of human existence. It is "*eudaimonia*" which is usually translated as happiness or "human flourishing". However, happiness or human flourishing is not subjective feeling or satisfaction. Rather it is an objective achievement, of excellence.

The path to this goal of happiness is understood to be a long and strenuous, and the pursuit of it is the work of a life-time. As Aristotle says:

One swallow does not make a summer; neither does one day. Similarly neither can one day, or a brief space of time,

³ Norton, "Moral Minimalism and the Development of Moral Character", p. 187.

make a man blessed and happy.⁴

This means that happiness or *eudaimonia* is to be evaluated in a complete life and not with regard to discrete acts or episodes in one's life. The pursuit of happiness or *eudaimonia* or human flourishing, in effect, coincides with the practice of virtues. Thus, Alasdair MacIntyre observes that

what constitutes the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life. We thus cannot characterize the good for man adequately without already having made reference to the virtues.⁵

Thus we may conclude that for the ancients, there is an intrinsic connection between human nature and human flourishing. It requires the knowledge of the general capacities and characteristics of human beings to discover how a good man will act. For the structure of human nature provides the basis and the direction to human flourishing. The understanding of the former enables a person to strive for the latter.

In tune with this ancient line of thought, we develop a connection between being a human being and being a person. While the

⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 76.

⁵ *After Virtue*, p. 149.

former pertains to the contours of human nature, the latter correspondingly represents an ideal of moral personhood. Human flourishing consists in man's striving to attain the ideal of moral personhood. And the attaining of moral personhood, it is argued, is synonymous with the actualization of virtuous or good human life. In our view, thus, the main concern of morality is with how a person engages in qualitative self-transformation so as to become a worthy human being.

In view of these considerations, we develop the thesis in two parts. In the first part, we critically articulate the account of moral personhood that in our view underlies the various strands of liberal moral theory which is deeply entrenched in modern moral philosophy. The liberal tradition in modern moral philosophy manifests itself in contractarianism, utilitarianism, Kantianism and various combinations of these. Despite important differences between them, they share many themes under the common umbrella of individualism. Examples are many: *abstract identity of the individual, mutual disinterestedness, freedom of choice, procedural rationality, asocial and ahistorical character of morality, atomistic account of human life, action-centered view of morality*. We critically evaluate each of these in order to show the limitations of liberal individualism to adequately account for the idea of moral personhood.

The first part comprises of the first two Chapters. In Chapter One, we explicate the notion of moral personhood underlying the contractarianism of Thomas Hobbes, utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham

and John Stuart Mill and the ethics of Immanuel Kant. Hobbes has deeply influenced contemporary moral thinking. He describes individuals as natural seekers of self-advantage who in a contract bound society turn out to be mutually disinterested beings. In our view, Hobbesian moral philosophy cannot account for moral personhood because it empowers not the value-sensitive rationality but the ego-centric rationality. And ego-centricity, we believe, negates the very possibility of becoming a moral person. After discussing the contractarian views of Hobbes, we discuss the utilitarian tradition as formulated by Bentham and Mill. We argue that Mill, despite his critique of Bentham's quantitative utilitarianism, does not succeed in improving upon Benthamite position. Mill never goes beyond Bentham's hedonistic psychology. Consequently, he too conceives of a moral person in the homogeneous medium - bereft of qualitative discriminations in which a plain calculation of desires is the only criterion of moral decision making. Lastly, we evaluate Kant's position that forcefully argues in favor of the distinct identity of the moral person. We argue that his distinction between the intelligible world (a world of reason) and the sensible world (a world of inclinations) creates a sense of mental hierarchy and subordination which never allows a person to have integral moral experience.

In Chapter Two, we discuss the underlying account of moral personhood in the contemporary formulations of modern strands of liberal individualism. Here, we begin with David Gauthier's "Minimax Individualism" which represents a continuation of Hobbes's

contractarianism. Gauthier's account of a moral person is that of a person who is entirely free from any natural affective bonds and who "cooperates" only with equals for mutual benefit. Like Hobbes, morality for Gauthier is an artifice which has authority only in so far as it ensures successful pursuit of self-interest.

We then discuss R.M. Hare's universal prescriptivism. In our view his position endorses subjective individualism. This discussion is followed by an examination of John Rawls's deontological liberalism. This version of liberalism is criticized for its asocial characterization of the human individual as an "antecedently individuated self".

Chapters One and Two together provide an account of moral personhood as represented in the liberal framework of modern moral philosophy. The main thrust of moral thinking in the liberal individualist tradition is that the individual moral agent has the unrestrained will and the freedom to make a moral choice which is detached from the encumbrances of tradition and socially transmitted criteria of moral evaluation. Given this individualist stance, the pursuit of an end means the exercise of freedom of choice guided by one's own interests or ego-centric rationality. On this picture of human individual, a social organization is viewed as constituted of self-interested and mutually disinterested individuals pursuing their self-chosen ends. The mutually disinterested, or essentially self-interested beings enter into social engagement from the outside, as it were, and live with one another only because of individual

expediency and convenience. Edmund Pincoffs's comment regarding the consequence of such a conception of human individual is worth quoting:

By focusing on the abstracted-from-the-social-order individual and on the foundations for decisions concerning what to do in a hopelessly abstract environment in which all that counts is consistency or supposed social contract or the happiness of everyone, ethical theories pass too easily over the topics that should be central in ethics.⁶

In the second part, we argue for an alternative position through an account of moral personhood, which avoids the pitfalls of liberal moral theory. As against the "action-centered view of morality", we make an attempt to argue in favor of the "person-centered view of morality", where becoming a moral person involves seeking to qualitatively transform oneself into a worthy human being. We maintain that becoming fully a person and respecting others as fully persons is an achievement that is not assured of for all of us.

Thus in Chapter Three, we prepare the ground for an account of morality that befits the moral potential of the human individual. In preparing this ground, we reformulate the central moral question as "how should I live?" rather than "what ought I to do?" This paves the way into the second part of the thesis. The purpose of this reformulation is to emphasize that

⁶ *Quandaries and Virtues*, p. 10.

becoming a moral person involves a certain *striving*. This striving consists of a continuous, integral and self-conscious effort to live a worthwhile life.

In Chapter Four, we describe the conditions of moral personhood. The central contention is that the life of a person, that consists of an intermittent series of right doings, punctuated by many non-moral doings, never amounts to a worthwhile life. For a worthwhile life involves seamless striving for moral development. The attainment of moral personhood involves becoming a value-sensitive rational being occupying the inter-subjective space of personal reciprocity. This notion of moral personhood involves those constitutive conditions that make a person a fit subject of moral life. These conditions are explained in terms of features such as personal consciousness, value-laden character of consciousness, and the complex attitudinal fabric into which personhood itself is woven.

Finally, in Chapter Five, we recapitulate the limitations of liberal moral theory so as to highlight its restrictive minimalist stance. The minimalist stance is eliminative of the very idea of a moral life conceived of as a worthwhile life. The composition of a worthwhile life is that of a narrative unity, and the narrative of such a life is directed towards a valued end. This valued end is the attainment of a kind of inner transparency that is uniquely necessary to the full realization of moral personhood. It is the end of selflessness, or egolessness.

The thesis highlights the supreme significance of the attainment of

inner transparency for the full realization of moral personhood. No person is truly moral until freed of every shred of selfishness. And since selflessness is a spiritual virtue, morality is ultimately spiritual. To overlook this supra-rational dimension of moral life is to undermine the very essence of morality.

Chapter One

The Moral Person in Liberal Individualism: Modern Moral Theory

1.0 Introduction

The conception of the human individual that is largely prevalent in modern western thought in general and moral thought in particular is that of a liberal individual. The liberal individual is, to use Macpherson's phrase, the possessive individual who "is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities owing nothing to society for them."¹ Elaborating the nature of possessive individual, Macpherson writes:

Man is the proprietor of his own person. He is what he owns. The human essence is freedom to do what one wills with his own, a freedom properly limited only by such rules which are needed to secure the same freedom for others. On this assumption, the only best society (indeed the only good society) is one in which all social relations between individuals are transformed into market relations in which men are related to each other as possessors of their own

¹ *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, p. 3.

capacities (and of what ever they have acquired by the exercise of their capacities).²

In contrast to the traditional ideas of morality, justice and society prevalent in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, we find a new system of beliefs taking shape in the modern period. What is significant about the contrast is that, whereas in the traditional view the locus of ethical values and rights is the community of persons, in the modern liberal view such values and rights are located entirely in the individual. This is a radical change in perspective, a change from communitarianism to individualism.

In this chapter, we shall discuss the views of Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, all of whom are the classical progenitors of contemporary liberal moral thought.

1.1 Hobbes: Securing Self-advantage

The theoretical roots of individualism are clearly manifested in Hobbes. Although, Hobbes is usually regarded more as a political philosopher than as a moral philosopher, his egoistic conception of human nature underpins a considerable part of modern western moral philosophy. In his view, morality of its own accord has absolutely no authority over human behavior. All human passions and endeavors are simply manifestations of the

² "Market Concepts in Political Theory", p. 496.

individual's desires for his own good. Hobbes builds his moral theory on a conception of the natural condition of human kind in which men are entirely self-interested and mutually unconcerned.

In the state of nature, Hobbes says, men are absolutely free. Each man has the right of nature to do whatever one will in the pursuit of one's selfish ends, owing no obligation to others to do for them or allow them to do what may be necessary for their own self-preservation. Driven as they are by their selfish nature and given their distrust of each other, they inevitably find themselves in conflict with one another. Their "perpetual desire of power after power" leads them into a condition of "war of every man against every man."³ In such a state of nature, the ideas of right and wrong, just and unjust can have no meaning. Rather, as Hobbes writes:

whatever is the object of any man's Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part, calleth Good: And the object of his Hate and Aversion, Evill.⁴

But, as war is inimical to self-preservation, it is in every one's interest to escape from this brutish but natural condition of war of every man against every man, Hobbes conceives of this natural requirement of self-preservation as the fundamental law of nature: "That every man ought to endeavor Peace as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he

³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 185.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of Warre."⁵ But *ought* here is not the ought of moral law. As mentioned above, in the Hobbesian state of nature there simply can be no moral obligation. The law of nature states a requirement of reason that forbids man "to do that which is destructive of his life or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved."⁶

It is to be noted in this context that, in Hobbes's construal, the character of reason changes drastically from what the traditional view of reason takes it to be. Unlike Aristotle or Aquinas who consider the role of reason to be to apprehend what is ethically good for humans, Hobbes believes that reason "is equipped only to calculate the means to achieve what individuals desire."⁷ Thus, Hobbes's first law of nature as stated above requires man to endeavor for peace but if he cannot obtain it he is free to take recourse to war.

From the first law of nature Hobbes derives the second law which requires as a fundamental means to peace, "that a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre - forth as for Peace, and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contended with so much liberty with other men, as he would allow other men against himselfe."⁸ Since the unlimited freedom available to man as a

⁵ Ibid., p. 190.

⁶ Ibid., p. 189.

⁷ Regan, *The Moral Dimensions of Politics*, p. 47.

⁸ *Leviathan*, p. 190.

right of nature is disadvantageous to all, reason suggests that renouncing a part of this right would be beneficial to all but on condition that the renunciation was mutual. For, as Hobbes says, "if other men will not lay down their Right, as well as he, then there is no reason for anyone to divest himself of his; For that were to expose himself to prey, rather than dispose himself to Peace."⁹

Thus for Hobbes morality emerges from mutual agreement for the mutual benefit of beings who are essentially self-interested. Morality is authoritative for men only in so far as it enhances their self-interest.

But what assurance that the parties to the agreement will all abide by it?-- What if one finds flouting the agreement to one's advantage. Hobbes believes that it would be irrational to comply with the constraints of morality unless there was assurance that others would. However, such an assurance in the state of nature is impossible to obtain despite Hobbes's third law of nature which requires men to "perform their covenant made."¹⁰ For Hobbes's fool believes that injustice may "sometimes stand with that Reason which dictateth to everyman his own good."¹¹ Therefore, to make the contract binding, that is, to enforce it, men are required to establish a sovereign. For, as Hobbes writes, "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words' and of no strength to secure a man at all."¹² Thus, men in order

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

to avoid death and gain for themselves the possibility of commodious living, come to acknowledge a perpetual sovereign power.

But what kind of commodious living would it be when Hobbes already refuses to admit any *summum bonum* or greatest good? His explanation comes in as a part of his theory of human nature. He says that human's desire keeps progressing from one object to another; in essence, it is a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceases only in death. Thus, it draws a picture of human striving which is directed towards gratification of desires after desire without paying attention to the question, "how should I live?" For there is no scope for a rational estimation of desires. There are thus no higher order desire(s) which can serve the basis for the assessment of one's immediately occurrent desires which are responsible for action.

Apart from his view of human nature, the other reason that does not allow humans to entertain the question, "how should I live", is that Hobbes treats all objects of desires as *individual* objects of desire. That is to say, in Hobbesian system humans inevitably desire one object after another and so these desires do not include the desire to live a certain kind of life.

At the same time, in Hobbes's contractarian position, humans are conceived as inherently asocial and amoral beings. They are individuals first, who then enter (artificially) into a social-political framework only

as a device to safeguard their fundamentally self-interested needs. There is no common purpose or ideal that figures as an original feature of people and their lives. In place of a common purpose or ideal, what we find is a *moral* code that apparently emerges out of mutually advantageous conventions. Will Kymlicka puts the point thus: "While social conventions are not really contracts, we can view this bargaining over mutually advantageous conventions as the process by which a community establishes its 'social contract'."¹³

Such conventions, however, assume natural equality of physical power as a fundamental condition of morality. For, by nature man is entitled to use whatever means are available and the question of moral constraints arises only when people are equal in physical power.

Thus, the contractual morality of Hobbes projects the development of moral personhood on negative grounds. Since a person cares only for self-interest, which he finds endangered in the company of others, he adopts the path of a reluctant bargainer. And, obviously, since moral values are the resultant products of that bargaining, these values merely are a device of egoistic prudence. In acting morally man seeks to promote his and only his advantage. Self-preservation is the basic motive in entering the contract. That the contract would be of *mutual* advantage to the parties

¹³ "The Social Contract Tradition", p. 189.

entering the contract is not what motivates the contractors.¹⁴

Hence, we do not really find any account of moral personhood in the Hobbesian system. At best we find a representation of a person who gets motivated to entertain moral concerns solely for the sake of his limited perception of self-interest.

1.2 Bentham and Mill: Promoting Utility

If for Hobbes the natural source of right and wrong are desires and aversions, for Bentham, they reside in pleasure and pain. Bentham writes:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.... They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.¹⁵

Bentham derives from this hedonistic psychology, the principle of utility (the principle of greatest happiness or felicity) since he believes that it is the only principle which takes into account the *natural* fact of human life. Accordingly, the propriety of human action is viewed to consist in its tendency to produce the greatest happiness of all whose interests are in

¹⁴ On the face of it it appears out of place to talk of contractual morality and the development of a moral person in the context of Hobbes. For he outrightly denies the presence of natural duties and rights and a real moral difference between right and wrong. But its significance becomes apparent when we take into account the influence of Hobbesian construal of contractual morality in the works of Kurt Baier (1958), John Rawls (1971), David Gauthier (1986) and many others.

¹⁵ *An Introduction to The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, p. 33.

question.¹⁶ A moral person would thus seem to be one who strives to make his actions conform to this principle. He is to pursue his own happiness and simultaneously promote the happiness of others as well. But as men are psychologically inclined to seek their own individual pleasures, it is through the use of sanctions (namely, the physical, the political, the religious, and the moral, that is popular opinion in general) that the *natural* man is sought to be transformed and made to cultivate interest in the promotion of happiness of others, that is general happiness.

Bentham's major concern, however, is not to make available a criterion for individual actions. The principle of Utility in his scheme is mainly to secure a firm foundation of his general jurisprudence. Only those laws which are conformable to the principle of utility - the greatest happiness of the greatest number - would be justified. Pleasure or pain are for him mere sensations; and he believes that their value could be exactly calculated in purely quantitative terms.

He, therefore, devises his *felicific calculus* which is the cornerstone of *the whole fabric of morals and legislation*. But, given that for Bentham it is only the quantity of pleasure or pain that matters in the discrimination of good from bad, the idea of the *separateness of persons*, that is, distinct persons with their distinctive interests, finds no theoretical relevance in his theory.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

Mill, the immediate and the most influential follower of Bentham, regrets that Bentham does not acknowledge the inner capacities of individual man. Speaking of Bentham he observes:

Man is never recognized by him as a being capable of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end; of desiring, for its own sake, the conformity of his own character to his standard of excellence, without hope of good or fear of evil from other source than his own inward consciousness. Even in the more limited form of Conscience, this great fact in human nature escapes him.¹⁷

Mill goes on:

Nor is it only the moral part of man's nature, in the strict sense of the term - the desire of perfection, or the feeling of an approving or of an accusing conscience - that he overlooks; he but faintly recognizes, as a fact in human nature, the pursuit of any other ideal end for its own sake. The sense of *honor*, and personal dignity - that feeling of personal exaltation and degradation which acts independently of other people's opinion, or even in defiance of it; the love of *beauty*, the passion of the artist; the love of *order*, of congruity, of consistency in all things, and conformity to their end; the love of *power*, not in the limited form of power over other human beings, but abstract power, the power of making our volitions effectual; the love of *action*, the thirst for movement and activity, a principle scarcely of less influence in human life than its opposite, the love of *ease*: - None of these powerful constituents of human nature are thought worthy of a place

¹⁷ "Bentham", p. 100.

among the 'Springs of Action;'...(original emphasis).¹⁸

We have quoted Mill at length only to endorse his critique of Bentham. But the important question here for us is whether Mill's utilitarianism is sufficiently different from Benthamite utilitarianism so as to allow significant moral space for any of the other - one might say "nobler" - "springs of action" that he speaks of. The answer seems to us to be an emphatic no. Mill is aware that the doctrine of pleasure as the goal of life may appear "mean and groveling" something "worthy only of swine".¹⁹

To salvage the doctrine he seeks to enlarge the Benthamite conception of happiness by bringing into his utilitarianism the idea of qualitative differentiation between pleasures. Indeed, a moral theory which talks about happiness as the end of human conduct must have an acceptable notion of happiness. Such notion must, at the very least, include the idea of qualitative character of happiness. That is to say, it is not merely the quantitative dimension of pleasure which makes it more or less valuable as Bentham believed, but also, and more importantly, its qualitative dimension. It is precisely its absence in the Benthamite conception that constitutes the almost universally adduced reason for the rejection of Bentham's utilitarian moral theory. Mill appears to be more discerning. He writes:

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-01.

¹⁹ *Utilitarianism*, pp. 257-58.

Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification.²⁰

Thus some pleasures, such as pleasures of artistic activity, pleasures of literary and intellectual pursuits, are worthier than others since they befit our nature as human beings, or as Mill says, are derived from higher human faculties.

All this is quite in order. We also take note of the universalism that Mill claims for his utilitarianism. He writes that "the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned."²¹ Mill, in this manner, visualizes in his ethics of utility the spirit of Christianity: "to do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbor as yourself."²²

However, it remains to be seen how well this exalted altruistic view of utilitarian morality sits with Mill's commitment to Bentham's hedonistic psychology. In our view, there is no decisive evidence in Mill's essay on utilitarianism to suggest a clear break from Bentham's hedonistic view of human nature. Of course, one may wish to argue that the passages from Mill, which we have quoted above, are in themselves sufficient to show Mill's

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

²² *Ibid.*

decisive withdrawal from the Benthamite conception of human nature. Mill's idea of qualitative hierarchy of pleasure and the idea that qualitatively higher pleasures are derived from higher human faculties, echo thoughts of classical humanists like Plato and Aristotle.

However, had Mill been a humanist of the classical mold and not a hedonist that we believe he is, his view would have been that since human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, the ultimate human good consists in the exercise of those distinctive human faculties and capacities. Or, he would have said that human beings *ought* to seek their happiness in the exercise of distinctive human capacities. But, Mill is not saying that there is an essential connection between human nature and human happiness such that certain activities constitute natural and proper goal of human life and make up the content of human happiness because they are essentially human. Rather, what Mill seems to be implying is that human beings have certain distinctive faculties such that once made aware of them, "they are not fully satisfied by a happiness which does not involve the exercise of them".²³

For Mill, therefore, the connection between *more elevated* human faculties and qualitatively higher pleasures is subjective and psychological. This becomes amply evident when viewed in the context of how Mill actually defines qualitative differences between pleasures. He writes:

²³ Norman, *The Moral Philosophers*, p. 128.

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but *one possible answer*. Of the two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a *decided preference*, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. (emphasis added)²⁴

Here, Mill is not defining qualitative superiority of some pleasures over others in terms of the hierarchy of human nature. Nor is he saying that superior or higher pleasures have something intrinsic to them which gets revealed to us when we have them. Rather what makes superior pleasures superior is that they are preferred by all or almost all who have them. It is simply on account of subjective preference that certain pleasures are regarded higher or superior.

One may, however, want to insist on behalf of Mill that it is not merely because some pleasures happen to be preferred by a majority of human beings that constitutes their qualitative superiority. Rather it is because their preference is backed by the authority of those who are, as Mill calls them, competent judges: those who can properly discriminate between pleasures and, as it were, apprehend that which makes some pleasure superior.

²⁴ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 259.

Our immediate response to the above sort of argument, especially in respect of its appeal to the authority of competent judges, is that it does not quite fit with Mill's adherence to the principle of individual liberty. But be that as it may, what is pertinent here is the notion of competent judge which apparently plays a crucial role in the above argument.

Who is a competent judge? One cannot just say: The one who has experience of a vast range of pleasures. Nor can one say: The one who has elevated human faculties. The former answer amounts to nothing, for simply having experienced great many pleasures can hardly make one discern what pleasures are in fact higher and what lower. The latter answer requires further elaboration of elevated human faculties independently of any reference to supposedly higher or lower pleasures. For otherwise the notion of competent judge would become viciously circular.

Mill does not give either answer in exclusion from the other. He gives them both together. His account²⁵ in effect is that a competent judge is one who is "equally acquainted with", and "equally capable of appreciating and enjoying" both higher and lower pleasures, but above all has "a sense of dignity" in that "he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence". The circularity in the idea of a

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-60.

competent judge is thus writ large rather amply. For what else could a lower grade existence consist except of enjoyment of what is felt to be lower grade pleasures. Higher pleasures are just those pleasures which are felt preferred by men who have the competence to enjoy them. And, men who have this competence are just those who have a felt preference for pleasures which are higher.

In short, "the gist", as George Kerner writes, "of what Mill is saying is that pleasures which are higher in quality are just those pleasures which are *felt* higher". "The quality of pleasures is thus more like the quality of wines than of tyres or yard goods."²⁶

To reiterate, Mill's idea of qualitative hierarchy of pleasures makes no real departure from Bentham's psychological hedonist view of human nature. His musings such as,

Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasure; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs.²⁷

²⁶ Kerner, *Three Philosophical Moralists*, p. 20.

²⁷ *Utilitarianism*, p. 259.

though evocative, are no more than tautologies of the sort like well-meaning homilies. As homilies they have a point but not the one that cannot be appropriated by Bentham without any severe compromise with his hedonist thesis.²⁸

Now, to proceed further, Mill's utilitarian moral standard, "that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness",²⁹ is founded exclusively on his belief that human nature is so constituted as to desire nothing but pleasure and pleasure alone.³⁰ He writes:

No reason can be given why general happiness is desirable, except that each person so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good: that each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons.³¹

Mill's *proof* of the utilitarian moral standard that we have stated above has been widely commented upon. But we need not enter into that debate. Relevant to our concern with the idea of a moral person is the claim that

²⁸ See Bentham's discussion of the various kinds of pleasures and pains in chapter V of his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. It could assimilate Mill's idea of qualitatively higher pleasures.

²⁹ *Utilitarianism*, p. 257.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 288-89.

human beings desire nothing but pleasure. Does the practiced self-consciousness and self-observation, assisted by the observation of others really confirm it as Mill believes. Many ordinary mortals would not be persuaded by his argument ³² that all cases of things that they believe they desire not for the sake of pleasure, but for what they in themselves were, that is for their own sake are actually cases of transferred pleasure. That is, they are initially desired as a means to pleasure but eventually by a strong association come to be regarded as *ingredients of pleasure*. And therefore they get mistakenly regarded as if they are desired for their own sake. Surely a Kant would not be so convinced. But then to make his case absolutely certain, Mill writes that

desiring a thing and finding it pleasant, aversion to it and thinking of it as painful, are phenomena entirely inseparable; in strictness of language, two different modes of naming the same psychological fact: that to think of an object as desirable (unless for the sake of its consequences), and to think of it as pleasant, are one and the same thing; and to desire anything, except in proportion as the idea of it is pleasant is a physical and metaphysical impossibility.³³

Thus we get the *shut up* call. No more is it a matter of *fact and experience*; rather, we are told, the fact of the matter is the linguistic usage: "To think of an object as desirable, and to think of it as pleasant are one and the same thing."

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 289-92.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

But, then, if the desire for pleasure is so all consuming, what ethical significance can be ascribed to those other *inner sources* of action of which Mill speaks in his criticism of Bentham? There Mill has us believe that such sources of action as the sense of honor, personal integrity, conforming one's character to one's own standard of excellence, love of beauty, desire for spiritual perfection, etc. are facts about human nature which cannot be brought under the rubric of the pleasure principle. And it is precisely for this reason that we endorsed his critique. But now we have Mill the utilitarian telling us that the desire for any of these independently of the desire for pleasure is a physical and metaphysical impossibility.

What is more, even as part of the desire for pleasure, they have no relevance at all, let alone ethical relevance in the estimation of action which emanate from them. Their value as motivational input is counted out from Mill's utilitarian calculation. For he now believes that motive has nothing to do with the morality of action.³⁴ He writes:

He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motivation or the hope of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays the friend that trusts him is guilty of a crime even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under greater obligation.³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Thus, in the Utilitarian moral world no action has any distinctive ethical identity other than being right or wrong and that too solely in virtue of the amount of happiness it produces. It recognizes maximization of happiness as the sole good that confers value on action. Actions are right (or wrong) in proportion as they produce or tend to produce happiness (or its deprivation). Therefore, a failed deed, for example, someone trying to rescue a child who is caught in a burning house, however ennobling otherwise, carries no moral weight on the utilitarian moral standard. For as Mill writes: "A sacrifice which does not increase or tend to increase the sum total of happiness is a waste".³⁶ In fact a failed attempt such as the above would turn out to be morally wrong on this standard in the event the rescuer himself was devoured by the raging fire. In other words, to paraphrase Charles Taylor, the greatest happiness principle creates an illusion as if there is a homogeneous mode of calculation that determines the domain of "moral ought".³⁷

What is more, it also creates the illusion as if happiness is a unitary simple notion standing for a fixed and identical end-state of mind. The fact, however, is that there are far too many different kinds of activities which produce different end-states. The pleasure, for example, of reading *God of Small Things* is different from, say, tending plants in one's garden, or solving a puzzle, or listening to a piece of Indian classical music. A soldier's way of life produces happiness which does not belong to the life of

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³⁷ Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods", pp. 231-33.

a philosophy teacher. In short, given the diverse modes and sources of pleasurable experience, the criterion of greatest happiness does not really tell us as which activity or which life is worthier than the rest. To put the matter in terms of MacIntyre's pithy observation: "If someone suggests to us in the spirit of Bentham and Mill, that we should guide our own choices by the prospects of own future pleasure or happiness, the appropriate retort is to inquire: "But which pleasure, which happiness ought to guide me?"³⁸

The standpoint of utilitarian morality, the greatest happiness principle simply fails to take into account the fact that we often make ethically significant qualitative distinction between actions and modes of life. This involves essential reference to the agent's motives. Distinctions such as what is noble or vile, forgiving or revengeful, just or unjust, gratitude or ingratitude, honest or dishonest, and the like play a vital role in the making of actual moral decisions and attitudes.

But once motives as value-conferring sources of actions are defined out from the moral scene, once moral estimation of actions is completely severed from their motivational input, no worthwhile distinction between different moral grades of action can be meaningfully made. For the ethical identity of an action is, as it were, consummated and exhausted without residue by the amount of happiness (or unhappiness) it conduces. Consequently, there remains little of persons that is morally significant from

³⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 63-64.

the utilitarian point of view. Persons are simply producers and consumers of happiness.

1.3 Kant: Legislating for Oneself

Whatever specific disagreements there might be on the concept of a person, there seems to be unanimity on the point that persons are self-conscious rational beings. That is to say, humans are conscious of what they think and do and can give reasons for their thoughts and actions. It is this feature of self-conscious rationality that is accorded the status of the central determinant of morality by some philosophers. Persons are held to be moral agents because their rationality generates the demands of morality which are to be unconditionally obeyed in the society of persons.

Kant espouses the above view. His approach distinctly begins from the concept of a person and he construes the condition of being rational as a condition of freedom to act as well. This freedom, generated by rationality, implies that persons are able to exercise their choice freely and they can incur and acknowledge obligations. Kant establishes an essential link between morality and reason. He maintains that

man actually finds in himself a power which distinguishes him from all other things and even from himself so far as he is affected by objects. This power is reason.... Because of this a rational being must regard himself qua intelligence (and

accordingly not on the side of his lower faculties) as belonging to the intelligible world, not to the sensible one. He has therefore two points of view from which he can regard himself and from which he can know laws governing the employment of his powers and consequently governing all his actions. He can consider himself first - so far as he belongs to the sensible world - to be under the laws of nature (heteronomy); and secondly - so far as he belongs to the intelligible world - to be under laws which, being independent of nature, are not empirical but have their ground in reason alone.³⁹

On the basis of this distinction between the intelligible and the sensible, Kant argues that the individual while partaking in the intelligible world comes into terms with his self as a free moral being. He states:

We see now that when we think of ourselves as free, we transfer ourselves into the intelligible world as members and recognize the autonomy of the will together with its consequences morality; whereas when we think of ourselves as under obligation, we look upon ourselves as belonging to the sensible world and yet to the intelligible world at the same time.⁴⁰

Thus the distinction between the intelligible world and the sensible world fundamentally determines the contours of his moral writing. The sensible world is a world of natural selves who are controlled and determined by their feelings and emotions. It is only by way of participating

³⁹ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, pp. 112-13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

in the intelligible world, which is a world of reason, that humans are able to live moral lives and thereby live a characteristically human life. However, the said distinction, as we shall observe later, produces serious implications for acknowledging the complexities of moral experience.

For Kant, reason alone forms the bedrock of moral personhood. For the crux of Kantian morality is the moral law, and the moral law finds its absolute source in reason. This uncompromising rationality of Kantian morality clearly renders the *empirical* dimension of personhood - the person as a sentient, desiring and passionate being - ethically extraneous. As John Casey puts it,

Kant argued that since the moral law must apply to all rational beings generally, then it must apply to man simply as a rational being. No truly moral command could be based on man's 'empirical nature' - upon particular desires, strengths, or skills.⁴¹

For Kant the category *moral* is hermetically sealed off from all natural human desires and feelings. The simple possession of good will - the determination to do the right for the sake of the right - is the necessary and the only requirement of being a good man. Man from the Kantian moral point of view is truly respected only for having this good will, while other accidental or acquired possessions like intelligence, generosity, wit, good

⁴¹ Casey, *Pagan Virtue*, p. 3.

temper are regarded ethically irrelevant.

Kant expounds the argument that the reason - which is the sole determinant of will both in the sense of informing us what is morally right and motivating us to adhere to it - has the force to transform a human being into a moral person. For him to be a moral person is the natural outcome of being a rational being since rationality generates the moral law.

The moral law holds the central key in the Kantian ethic. Kant contends that the moral agent has a duty - a requirement of acting from the respect for the moral law. The moral law, however, is not something which is imposed upon human beings from outside. Rather, it is self-legislated by a rational being. The use of the term *law* conveys the sense of command that the higher or rational self exercises over the lower self, that is the self which is governed by inclinations. In so far as we are rational, morality simply is the expression of our own free will; and in so far as we are also creatures of inclinations, we have to obey the dictates of morality.

Further, Kant states that the moral law, expressed in the form of the categorical imperative - "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"⁴² - prescribes a fundamental condition of universalizability. Essentially, it is reflective of the necessary link that Kant invokes: if one is to act rationally it requires

⁴² Kant, *Ground of the Metaphysic of Morals*, p. 84.

that his actions should be universalizable. In other words, in case one believes that his action is rationally justified, then, according to Kant, he is to commit himself to the universal principle or maxim.

This procedure of universalizing a maxim commits a rational being to twin principles, namely consistency and impersonality. That is to say, a rational being's commitment to the condition of universalizability requires him to admit, first, that his reason for action will remain the same in similar situations and circumstances; and, second, his reason for action must also be a valid reason for *anyone* to do that very action in similar circumstances.

To consider Kant's example: a man is forced by necessity to borrow money despite the fact that he knows very well that he will not be able to repay it. Now, in this example, if at all he seeks rational justification of his action, he commits himself to the maxim that whenever need will arise, he will borrow money knowing fully well that he will not return it. And secondly anyone in need of money can borrow even while knowing the fact that he will not be able to return it. Obviously, he will not be able to hold on to the maxim of false promising since the predictable result of willing it to become a universal law would be the break down of trust. Kant contends, "For the universality of a law that every one believing himself to be in need can make promising, and the very purpose of promising, itself impossible, since no one would believe he was being promised

anything, but would laugh at utterances of this kind as empty shams."⁴³

We may note that the condition of universalizability understood as requiring consistency and impersonality, does not yet imply another equally important feature of universalizability, namely impartiality. That is: one's reasons for action must give equal weight to everyone's interests and desires including, of course, one's own.

Furthermore, in the Kantian ethic the categorical imperative is formulated in various forms. In one of these forms Kant specifically states, "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."⁴⁴

It is a "Formula of the End in Itself" which demands that we respect other's capacities to act so as to leave them free to act on maxims that we ourselves adopt. In essence, it asks us not to deceive and coerce. This formula as it appears is supportive of the earlier and the strictest formulation of the categorical imperative which is known as "The Formula of Universal Law."

These formulations of the categorical imperative constitute a binding force on us to choose only those principles which are

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

universalizable for all rational beings. But we may note that these formulations of the categorical imperative at most produce a test that helps us to weed out certain patterns of action. That is to say, the application of the categorical imperative to the actions is primarily a negative test: we ought not to perform those actions whose maxim or subjective principle does not accord with the categorical imperative. Partially it is so because the categorical imperative has no content. That is to say, it is divorced from all content of volition - from what is being willed. Basically it is a requirement of universality that Kant claims everyone recognizes when they ask, *what if everyone did that?* Apparently, then, there is no positive reference as to what we are supposed to do or how to live.

Since the categorical imperative has no substantive content, the individual is free to fill in whatever content he chooses, but only under rational constraints of consistency and coherence. It is therefore not surprising to find that the contemporary moral philosophers have exploited this aspect of Kant in pursuance of their liberal individualistic account of morality.

Nonetheless, the last formulation of the categorical imperative, namely the formulae of the end in itself recognizes the dignity of persons; that every person is to respect the dignity of oneself and the other as well. In pursuing one's end, one is not to use others as instruments. Treating the other person as an end also conveys the sense that the other

person has ends. Thus a moral person is to understand that "the ends of a subject who is an end in himself must, if this conception is to have its full effect in me, be also as far as possible, my ends."⁴⁵ This implies that the moral person, while pursuing his ends, is not to employ a means which violate the sanctity of other persons. Kant also argues that it is a duty of the agent to treat himself as an end. That is to say, one is to develop one's own capacities for rational agency in one's own person so as to show respect for humanity.

Ends, in their empirical mode, are the value-indicators which quite plausibly can be replaced with one another. For *value* is the worth possessed by an individual object of desire, be it a material object or a personal quality. Now a book, an object of my value, in the event of its loss, may be replaced by another copy of the book. And the absence of a personal quality, say a skill to play cricket, may be compensated for by the presence of another personal quality of intellectual skill.

However, this is not the case in respect of persons. Persons are beings who assign value to objects or ends. As sources of value, persons possess a different kind of worth. In so far as they are possessors of dignity, persons are irreplaceable. We cannot say that we can compensate for the killing of a person by bringing into existence another person.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Kant here advances a claim by contrasting *value* with *dignity*. Rational persons have absolute worth, which is why they serve as the ground of a possible categorical imperative. But the individual objects of desire have relative worth, which in turn can be the ground only of hypothetical imperative.⁴⁶

The rational nature of persons exists as an end in itself and therefore is an object of reverence the same reverence that we also feel for the moral law as the law of reason. Opposed to which is the man in the system of nature who merely possesses instrumental value. To quote Kant:

In the system of nature, a human being (*homo phenomenon*, *animal rationale*) is a being of slight importance and shares with the rest of the animals, as offspring of the earth, an ordinary value (*pretium vulgare*). Although a human being has, in his understanding, something more than they and can set himself ends, even this gives him only an extrinsic value for his usefulness (*pretium usus*), that is to say, it gives one man a higher value than another, that is, a price as of a commodity in exchange with these animals as things, though he still has a lower value than the universal medium of exchange, money, the value of which can therefore be called pre-eminent (*pretium eminens*).

But a human being regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in itself, that is he possesses a dignity (an

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world. He can measure himself with every other being of this kind and value himself on a footing of equality with them.⁴⁷

Indubitably it is a point of strength in the Kantian framework to recognize the uniqueness of people's lives and experiences and that at some fundamental level they are not exchangeable. But the recognition remains partial. That is to say, we are accorded dignity to the extent we remain *rationaly moral* and any *deviation* can set the balance off. Naturally then our empirical particularities get neatly packet out. It is so because here again Kant is sticking to his distinction between the sensible world and the intelligible world. And, he claims that since the former world is a world of determination, it is but only in the world of reason as noumenal selves that we possess dignity.

Here Kant in his effort to grant special status to man as a person creates a sense of *hierarchy* and *subordination* into our own conception of the person. As a result, we are to get accustomed to a particular form of dignity which strictly speaking is not responsive to our needs, desires, feelings and emotions as are elements in sensible world.

It seems unsatisfactory to theorize on human morality in terms of righteousness founded solely on reverence for the moral law, and to detach

⁴⁷ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 557.

the emotive and volitional aspect of personhood as morally irrelevant. In our view, the emotional and volitional aspects preserve certain most significant features of moral personhood. We may cite love and friendship, courage and loyalty, kindness and benevolence, as an assortment of such features which directly shape the moral character of persons and their mutual inter-relationship.

It therefore seems that we are justified in contesting the claim that self-conscious rationality is sufficient for moral personhood. We may reasonably wonder whether that account is really a *fair* account of a moral person. It does not seem so if we are to give full credence to an integral picture of the human agent as a moral agent. The integral conception would underscore the *humanity* of the person as a moral agent. And the emphasis on humanity is suggestive of the fact that the attainment of moral personhood is a process of development involving the whole person, both with reason and passion.

What is it to be a moral agent? This question needs answering in terms of the *total* moral experience of the *human* agent, rather than in the truncated way that Kantian framework accounts for it. The need is for an integral account that finds due space for the moral appropriateness and effectiveness of the affective-dispositional aspects of the human agent. In other words, the actual locus of moral agency is not just pure reason, but also includes non-rational factors such as dispositions and feelings which

provide concrete content for abstract reason to deal with. After all, the moral agent is not just a rational subject, but a subject of complex moral experience that involves various feelings as well. We may refer to what Bernard Williams says on this:

Moral experience involves many of one's deepest thoughts and feelings about one's own life and one's relation to others, while at the same time moral rules and expectations constitute one way, a very significant one, in which society is controlled and the relations of one citizen to another are formed.⁴⁸

The fact of moral experience thus is to be placed in the overall context of the moral life of the agent. For it is by exploring the agent's moral life that the complexity of his moral experience may be articulated. The question therefore is that of delineating the constituents of a moral life.

1.4 General Remarks

Given the turn towards individualism, free exercise of rational choice seems to be the only good that is central to the liberal tradition of morality. It implies a conception of morality which cannot make sense of the idea of moral personhood. For in the absence of a substantive ideal of human life, the freedom of rational choice reduces morality to a mere

⁴⁸ "Ethics", p. 547.

procedure - "an instrument of individual desire and will". Commenting on the liberal conception of a person, MacIntyre observes:

On the one hand the individual moral agent, freed from hierarchy and teleology, conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in his moral authority. On the other hand the inherited, if partially transformed rules of morality have to be found some new status, deprived as they have been of their older teleological character and their even more ancient categorical character as expressions of an ultimately divine law. If such rules cannot be found a new status which will make appeal to them rational, appeal to them will indeed appear as a mere instrument of individual desire and will.⁴⁹

The unfounded sanction of individual desire and will in moral individualism leads to a serious problem. It cannot accommodate a conception of an all-embracing plan for organizing one's life into a meaningful whole. For liberal moral theory emphasizes the exclusive importance of free exercise of rational choice in respect of particular but discrete moral situations. We shall see in the following chapter that even the contemporary liberal ethicists - because of their increased emphasis upon individual freedom and choice - remain oblivious to the need of such a conception which binds our actions and different ends into a coherent structure.

⁴⁹ *After Virtue*, p. 62.

Chapter Two

The Moral Person in Liberal Individualism: Contemporary Moral Theory

2.0 Introduction

The tendency to conceive of an ideally free and rational person leads modern liberals to ignore many vital conditions of moral personhood. Right from Hobbes to Rawls, the fundamental assumptions concerning human nature center around man's individuality and his freedom. While proposing various theoretical models, modern liberals begin with the notion of the individual *per se* which is why subsequently their arguments do not allow the individual to become a person who is *constituted in part by his central aspirations and attachments embedded in his social matrix*.

The predominantly individualist stance of the modern liberal thought is, thus, instrumental in breaking the natural unity of human beings and society. For, the individual is conceived of in entirely egocentric terms.

He is viewed as a rational maximizes of his wants or satisfaction of desires. It is only in order to realize this basic urge of desire satisfaction that the individual is seen to form an artificial alliance with others. Prior to this alliance, the individual already has the requisite freedom and rationality -- the constitutive elements of his identity -- to choose his ends. The individual's capacity to freely choose his ends appears to be the only moral characteristic of being a person.¹

The modern liberal thought has its ramifications in the contemporary period. The contemporary liberal moral thought further sharpens the feature of mutual disinterestedness in the characterization of the individual. The identity of the individual is conceived as antecedent to his social encumbrances. This identity is that of an essentially detached devoid of any affective bonds - entity constituted of pure will and reason.

In this chapter, we shall consider three major contemporary representatives of the legacy of liberal moral thought: David Gauthier, R.M. Hare and John Rawls.

2.1 Gauthier: Minimax Individualism

One of the major representatives of the Hobbesian contractarian tradition in the contemporary moral philosophy is Gauthier. His recent work, *Morals By Agreement*, has its conceptual underpinnings in Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

¹ MacIntyre, "Moral Philosophy: What Next?", p. 10.

Gauthier employs the contractarian methodology within the framework of instrumental reason and strategic rationality to erect the artifice of morality which, as Gauthier tells us, is meant for,

persons who live consciously in a post-anthropomorphic, post-theocentric, post-technocratic world.²

And it seeks to

allay the fear, or suspicion, or hope, that without a foundation in objective value or objective reason, in sympathy or sociality, the moral enterprise must fail.³

Gauthier begins his construction on a conception of natural or pre-moral man who is viewed to be unsentimental, non-tuistic maximizes. His natural man like that of Hobbes's man in the state of nature is "conceived as an independent center of activity, endeavoring to direct his capacities and resources to the fulfillment of his interests. He considers what he can do, but initially draws no distinction between what he may and may not do."⁴

The portrait of natural man thus involves an initial presumption against morality. How does such a man come to recognize the distinction

² "Moral Artifice", p. 385.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Morals By Agreement*, p. 9.

between what "he may or may not do?" *Morals By Agreement* seeks to provide an answer to this question. Drawing on the conception of practical reason as maximizing subjective value and strategic rationality, Gauthier develops his moral theory as a part of a rational choice theory. He argues that in "situations involving interaction with others, an individual chooses rationally only in so far as he constraints his pursuit of his own interest or advantage to conform to principles expressing the impartiality characteristic of morality. To choose rationally one must choose morally." ⁵

The structure of his moral theory involves complex details of modern theory of rational choice, decision theory and game theory. We need not concern ourselves to them. In what follows, we shall consider his central theme and the core ideas that go into the making of that theme.

Gauthier builds his social contract against the backdrop of what he calls a "morally free zone" which is an idealized conception of "the perfectly competitive market". In the perfectly competitive market rational interaction between mutually unconcerned individuals not only does not require any constraints on their individual utility-maximizing choices, they would be rationally and morally unjustified.⁶ The perfectly competitive market "exemplifies an ideal interaction among persons who, taking no interest in each others interests, need only follow the dictates

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

of their own individual interests to participate effectively in a venture for mutual advantage."⁷ The very structure of interaction in the perfectly competitive market ensures mutual advantage. It takes place under conditions that involve no circumstantial uncertainty and hence require no strategic calculations on the part of the participants. "Each chooses parametrically, as if his actions were the sole variable factor, taking the actions of others as fixed circumstances. And each chooses as if he knew the outcome of each of his possible actions."⁸

But then Gauthier argues that the natural harmony of interests which the perfectly competitive market exemplifies is not only not realized, it cannot be realized on account of the magnitude of the externalities of free-ridership and parasitism that obtain in actual market situations, and at any rate in our day to day interaction. Hence, arises the need for the constraints of morality which makes possible artificial harmony of interests amongst individuals who are supposed to be essentially unconcerned with each other.

Gauthier calls for a new mode of interaction, namely cooperative interaction to deal with the disruption of the pre-established harmony between equilibrium and optimum of the competitive market interaction, and degeneration of natural interaction for mutual advantage into force and fraud. Cooperation, he says, "is the domain of justice", defined as "the

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

disposition not to take advantage of one's fellows, not to seek free goods or to impose uncompensated costs, provided that one supposes others similarly disposed." ⁹ When cooperative behaviour conforms to the demands of practical rationality it "ensures the elimination of the free-ridership and parasitism endemic to our natural condition."¹⁰

Therefore, central to Gauthier's moral theory is the principle he formulates as the principle of maximum-minimum or minimax relative concession. It defines the terms for justice or rationality of a genuine cooperation. The principle is thus supposed to govern the process and content of agreement amongst prospective participants in a cooperative venture over the sharing of its possible outcome.

Through this principle, persons expect to gain the maximum while conceding the minimum. The defining line of this principle informs us that persons in any situation that involves human interaction calculate their individual gains *vis-à-vis* the available set of alternatives. While knowing fully well that each participant is going to concede the minimum and expect the maximum, each one chooses only that alternative which offers the maximum. Precisely, it is like gaining the maximum out of the available minimum.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Gauthier further relates this principle with what he calls the relative minimax principle. He maintains that the relative minimax principle takes into account the individual effort, or investment in the broadest sense. In effect, the principle requires that each gain is compared with the investment that each individual puts in. Thus it maintains a constant relative *comparison* between the gain and the investment. According to Gauthier, this relative minimax principle defined in terms of maximin relative benefit, "captures the ideas of fairness and impartiality in a bargaining situation, and so serves as the basis of justice".¹¹

The adherence to the relative minimax principle, according to Gauthier, excludes any room for partiality in a cooperative interaction. However, the principle requires each participant to constrain their maximizing activity.¹² He says:

Interaction that achieves impartiality without constraint constitutes a morally free zone, from which the externalities are absent that lead utility-maximizers into free-ridership and parasitism. But cooperative interaction faces these externalities; cooperation is the visible hand restraining persons from taking advantage of their fellows, but restraining them impartially and in a way beneficial to all. Such restraint commands rational acceptance; this is the idea underlying morals by agreement.¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Gauthier believes that most of our actual moral principles and practices are applications of the requirements of impartiality and constrained maximization that follow from the relative minimax principle. Thus he contends:

We may suppose that promise-keeping, truth-telling, fair-dealing, are to be defended by showing that adherence to them permits persons to cooperate in ways that may be expected to equalize, at least roughly, the relative benefits afforded by interaction. These are among the core practices of the morality that we may commend to each individual by showing that it commands his rational agreement.¹⁴

In Gauthier's framework, the relative minimax principle is a device in the hands of the bargainers whose rationality pushes them to work out the bargain in such a way that everybody in it concedes the minimum and gains the maximum. In a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, this principle, thus, governs the rationale of compliance with moral constraints for it ensures that the individual, who is a constrained maximizes, enjoys opportunities which the unconstrained maximizers lack.¹⁵

We may pause here to question, but who is this bargainer? To understand this we may look at Gauthier's allusion to Hobbesian

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

construction of the economic man, whose actions are the direct outcome of his appetites and aversions. He elaborates Hobbes's exposition of the economic man whose appetites and aversions basically are motions which arise as a response to some motions from external objects.¹⁶ Since man cannot live without desires and appetites, they, unlike sense and imagination, continue to operate all through his life. A man keeps trying to actualize his desires, be that of power, of riches, of knowledge, of Honor.¹⁷ This perpetual desire for power forms the core of the economic man. The economic man thus is the natural man who "is an indefinite appropriator, seeking to subdue more and more of the world to his power exercised in the service of his preferences."¹⁸ Further he adds:

In relating to other persons within the context of the market, the economic man exhibits a radically contractarian view of human relationships. With respect to the things that he can dominate, that he can treat instrumentally without being treated instrumentally in return, economic man is an appropriator; with respect to the persons whom he cannot dominate, whom he can treat instrumentally only if he lets himself be treated instrumentally in turn, he is a contractarian. ... Economic man is a radical contractarian in that all of his free or non-coercive interpersonal relationships are contractual. For him, voluntary social relationships require a rationale; contract provides it.¹⁹

In view of this natural state, the economic man considers moral and

¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 23,25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30,47.

¹⁸ Gauthier, *Morals By Agreement*, p. 316.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

political codes as conventional constraints which curb the natural expression of his desires. Hobbes justifies these constraints for creating order and avoiding the shortness and nastiness of life. But in the world of the economic man, according to Gauthier, order is only the first good brought about by society.²⁰ Gauthier argues that the necessity of human interaction produces progressive benefits and not merely order. Accordingly, Gauthier maintains that Hobbes's psychological portrayal of the economic man is perfectly right, but we need to acknowledge the fact that in a condition of society it undergoes a significant change. This change continues to occur in the light of continuous progress of the individual eventually transforming the economic man into the liberal individual. Since moral constraints contribute to the order that underlies this progress, the liberal individual treats these moral constraints not as necessary evil but beneficial devices.

Thus, for Gauthier a real self would mean the liberal individual who is a legitimate heir of the economic man but with advanced capacities. That is to say, the liberal individual, unlike the economic man who looks only for immediate individual specific goals, understands the need to satisfy long-term self-interest. The liberal individual acknowledges the intrinsic value of social participation because it directly shapes the preferences and endowments of individuals. This is why, his involvement in social activities, according to Gauthier, cannot strictly be characterized as

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

instrumental. Likewise Gauthier argues that the liberal individual's appreciation of the dictates of justice, affections for moral considerations, and self-critical appraisal of preferences cannot be viewed in instrumental terms since they all characterize his capacity to gain individuated expected utility *vis-à-vis* his considered preferences. For these considered preferences represent the good of the liberal individual. Accordingly his rationality comes to be a capacity to freely select and alter his preferences and subsequently look for the possible means to actualize these preferences.

2.1.1 Assessing Mutual Disinterestedness

In the contractarian scheme adherence to a moral code is supposed to be mutually advantageous. A moral code is meant to constrain naturally equal people in regard to what they are naturally entitled to do. It, however, implies that a person is allowed to escape from these constraints in case personal differences are sufficiently great. He says:

Our theory does not assume any fundamental concern with impartiality, but only a concern derivative from the benefits of agreement, and those benefits are determined by the effects that each person can have on the interests of her fellows. Only beings whose physical and mental capacities are either roughly equal or mutually complementary can expect to find cooperation beneficial to all. Humans benefit from their interaction with horses, but they do not cooperate with horses and may not benefit them. Among unequals, one party may benefit most by coercing the other, and on our theory would have no reason to refrain. We may condemn all coercive relationships, but only within the context of mutual benefit can

our condemnation appeal to a rationally grounded morality.²¹

It follows, therefore, that a person can, without any moral qualms, overstep the weak and the infirm, for, as Gauthier acknowledges, they "fall beyond the pale of morality tied to mutuality".²²

Clearly such a conception of morality cannot adequately account for, for example, the affective bond that a mother and her child share; the child in this arrangement can only be viewed as a "free-rider". Commenting on Gauthier's theory of morality, Annette Baier rightly observes:

Gauthier version of morality, it seems, does nothing to ensure that any young helpless human beings survive, since they all begin as parasites or free riders.... Infants are in the worst possible position, having had no chance to 'buy' care in advance. So the libertarian morality Gauthier is advocating would last only one generation, if we all adopted it, that is if we successfully pretended we were not affectively bonded, in order to freely choose a few rational bonds for which we could develop a free affection, and successfully disposed ourselves not to renege on our cool rational choices.²³

Hence, the conception of morality implied in Hobbes-inspired

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

²³ "Pilgrim's Progress", p. 327.

satisfaction can never provide a basis for the development of moral personhood because becoming a moral person is never a matter of plain calculation of self-interests. Rather it involves the development of various capacities *vis-à-vis* value-laden character of personal consciousness rooted in a social matrix. This rootedness, as we shall see in Chapter Four, signifies strong evaluation of preferences done in terms of qualitative distinctions like virtuous and vicious, noble and base, etc.

In Gauthier's framework, where contract for mutual advantage dictates the terms, juridical becomes the primary and moral the secondary. It treats a society merely as an instrument to satisfy and safeguard individual interests and its members as mutually disinterested bargainers. What governs the human interaction in such a set up are only the juridical precepts. Such a model overlooks the crucial difference that exists between morality and law. To quote John Kekes:

The law protects the society whose rules it embodies. Obeying the law is in the interest of the citizens, and disobedience is properly punished. But a person can abide by the law regardless of what goes on inside him. From the legal point of view, it is mainly the action that matters. This is not so for morality. Morality is essentially connected with the feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and intentions of the agent.²⁵

The contractarian picture entirely misses out on the "inward aspect" of morality. A morality bereft of inward aspect is nothing but

²⁵ "The Problem of Good", p. 105.

what Kekes calls "a system of hypocritical imperatives", inculcated right from childhood as a means of "prudent maximization of self-interest."²⁶ But as Kekes rightly observes that people "on occasions, want to act against their own interests, because something goes on inside them that prompts it. This inward aspect of morality is not just a prudent maximization of self-interest through social conformity."²⁷ Philippa Foot makes the same point when she avers that in the army of duty, men are volunteers.²⁸

Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that Gauthier's artifice of contractual morality can never direct a human being to become a moral person. As the striving of a moral person is not merely geared towards the riddance of scarcity, whether material or emotional, more significantly, it impels a human being to gain ever increasing control over his egocentric desires to live a qualitatively enriched life.

2.2 Hare: Utilitarian Individualism

Hare's thesis of universal prescriptivism is that moral thinking as a rational activity has a certain logical structure, because moral concepts have a certain logical character. While in *The Language of Morals* he sets out to explicate what he considers to be the logical features of moral concepts and moral judgment, in *Freedom and Reason* he tries to show how the logical character of moral concepts can be used to produce substantive

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*.

²⁸ "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," p. 170.

moral principles.

The central goal of Hare is to argue that moral discourse is a rational and critical discourse. Drawing upon the meaning of moral concepts, he contends that there are two logical features of moral judgments, namely, prescriptivity and universalizability. The moral agent deliberates in a certain manner so as to morally legitimize his preferences expressed in the form of judgments. These judgments then logically commits him to the action prescribed by the moral judgment. When an agent makes a judgment like "I ought to pay my debts", he commits himself to paying his debts. To deny the prescriptivity of moral judgments, according to Hare, would amount to denying an obvious logical fact about them, namely, that they are normally used to guide actions. To make a moral judgment about something is either to commend or to condemn it; and it is always in order to guide conduct or choices that we commend or condemn anything.

That the action-guiding role is intrinsic to a moral judgment is evident in what is involved in the notion of sincere assent to a moral judgment. A person is said to be sincere in his assent to a judgment, "I ought to x", if and only if he does, or resolves to do, x when the occasion arises. Since the ordinary, plain imperative sentence like "Shut the door" exemplifies the simplest form of prescriptive utterances, moral judgments in virtue of their prescriptivity must entail imperatives.

Simultaneously, the moral agent must also be prepared to exemplify a principle of action as a prescription to be followed by everyone else in like circumstances. In the present example, then, it would be: "everyone, in a situation like mine, ought to pay his debts." The thesis of universalizability of moral judgments is a formal requirement of making a moral choice, analogous to Kant's categorical imperative. It is not a substantive moral principle.

Given the prescriptivity and universality of moral judgments, Hare sets up a deductive structure for moral reasoning in which the principle of universalizability is made to function in such a way that it not only yields, in association with the relevant statement of facts, singular moral judgments, but also provides for a rational check in the selection or formulation of the principles of conduct a person may wish to abide by.

Suppose, a person says that a certain action X is wrong. By the principle of universalizability he would then be committed to the universal judgment that any action exactly like X, or like it in the relevant aspects is also wrong. On reflection, however, it may turn out that he himself has a preference for certain actions which are in the relevant respects like X. He now has a choice to either withdraw his original judgment or condemn his own actions which are like X. He cannot rationally do both, that is, endorse the former judgment but ignore the latter.

Interestingly, Hare also believes that the formal features of moral judgments are such that in any dispute regarding moral matters, they would generate agreement on principles which would be act-utilitarian. This normative consequence of his metaethics, which he argues for in *Freedom and Reason*, is forcefully and explicitly presented in his later work, *Moral Thinking*. Hare asserts that

the logical apparatus of universal prescriptivism, if we understand what we are saying when we make moral judgments, will lead us in critical thinking (without relying on any substantial moral intuitions) to make judgments which are the same as a careful act utilitarian would make.²⁹

In *Moral Thinking* Hare distinguishes between two levels of moral thought, namely intuitive and critical. In ordinary, run-of-the-mill situations one is guided by received moral intuitions or rules of conduct. This is the intuitive level of moral thinking. But there are also situations in which one is required to engage in critical moral reflection. The result of such reflection, according to Hare, would accord with act-utilitarianism. However, this does not mean that moral thoughts occurring solely at the intuitive level, without passing the critical test of reflective thinking, can qualify as moral judgment proper, even though, more often than not, cases of non-coincidence of these two levels of thinking are held to be rare or extraordinary.

²⁹ *Moral Thinking*, pp. 42-43.

Cases which seemingly pass through critical thinking but are morally counter-intuitive are either highly contrived or mere logical possibilities. Critics may succeed in citing logically possible cases, like it is right on utilitarian grounds to punish an innocent person for that will produce greater utility in the face of other available alternatives. But Hare contends that, on the one hand, in real life the violation of a rule, "one ought not to punish an innocent person" does not produce utility which outweighs disutility at least when we apply the clause: "all things considered". On the other hand, such type of cases, though logically possible, are so highly improbable that in real practice they do not make any difference to real life moral judgments.³⁰

We may get a better picture of the Harean moral person as we go through his arguments while dealing with what he calls a fanatic. A fanatic is one who after applying the critical method, is nonetheless prepared to accept the universalized prescription even if it runs counter to his own interests. In *Freedom and Reason* he cites an example of a sincere Nazi, who is ready to endorse his preference, "I ought to exterminate the Jews" even after conceding, in accordance with the principle of universalizability, that he would also be exterminated if he himself were a Jew. Hare argues that if his critical method which for him is essentially act-utilitarian - were properly applied, no one can possibly arrive at such

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

a conclusion. It implies that such a fanatic simply does not exist.

In *Moral Thinking*, Hare again opens up the issue of the fanatic by drawing a distinction between what he calls a pure fanatic and an impure fanatic. This discussion is taken up with a view to defending his earlier contention that following his universal prescriptivism does not lead to anti-utilitarian conclusions.

First, he considers the case of the impure fanatic, who is described as one who holds preferences that are counter-utilitarian. In so far as such a fanatic is unwilling to engage himself in critical thinking, since he is not ready to face the facts, or think logically at all, the existence of such a fanatic cannot threaten Hare's theory. The implication of this is, of course, that had he faced the facts, or thought logically about the case in question, he would have been constrained to agree to the act-utilitarian position.

Hare then goes on to examine the issue of the pure fanatic, which he considers in relation to two specific cases. The first case would be the one in which

the pure fanatic went on holding his opinions, and could not be budged from them by critical arguments, and in which these opinions proved to be indeed different from those which a utilitarian would reach.³¹

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Hare believes that such a fanatic would indeed present a difficulty, but he is quick to steer through this envisaged difficulty by claiming that such a pure fanatic cannot actually exist, because, he says:

the method of critical thinking which is imposed on us by the logical properties of the moral concepts requires us to pay attention to the satisfaction of the preferences of people (because moral judgments are prescriptive, and to have a preference is to accept a prescription); and to pay attention equally to the equal preferences of all those affected (because moral principles have to be universal and therefore cannot pick out individuals).³²

If we still insist on the existence of a pure fanatic of the first kind, it is, Hare thinks, due to the failure on our part to distinguish such a case from a pure fanatic of the second kind which

would be if the pure fanatic went on holding his opinions, but it turned out these were not, after all, inconsistent with utilitarianism.³³

But the existence of a pure fanatic of the second kind, though not logically impossible, is held to be highly improbable. It is on this ground of practical improbability that Hare regards the difficulty posed by the second

³² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

kind of pure fanatic as no actual threat to his theory.

To illustrate his point in regard to the second kind, Hare in *Moral Thinking* gives an example of a doctor who is determined to save the life of a patient regardless of the extent of suffering to the patient. The doctor is being called a fanatic because he is sticking to the principle, "Save lives" and he is elevating this principle over another principle, "Prevent suffering", which overrides the former in the face of critical thinking in particular circumstances. We may note that he is being called a fanatic not because of the content of intuitive principles but because of his attitude to principles.

Hare, to start with, tries to tackle this problem with the help of previous arguments that he applies to the earlier kind of pure fanatic. The doctor may be made to understand the range and implications of the method of critical thinking so that he may agree to abandon his attitude even at the cost of suffering that he himself may have to undergo. For he may realize the weakness of his moral conviction as he weighs the strength of preferences of both sides. In that case, however, he ceases to be a fanatic. But if it so happens that the doctor in question still persists with his line of action, then Hare would concede to the doctor's case. As Hare writes:

Or else he has to claim that his own preferences (together with those of people who think like him) are so strong and unalterable that they will continue to prevail over those of the

others whom his actions will cause or allow to suffer. If this claim be granted, then critical thinking will endorse the universal prescription that in such cases the fanatic's preferences should be implemented.³⁴

However, Hare states that if the above kind of case occurs, it nonetheless remains utilitarian as its solution favors highest acceptance utility. For the doctor favors an alternative which in his calculations promotes maximum preference satisfaction.

Against the charge of being counter-intuitive, Hare replies that since the alleged cases are tailor-made, these need not pose any threat to his method of critical thinking. These are, in Hare's view, "queer cases", such that, "if we address our critical thinking to queer cases, we shall get queer answers".³⁵

2.2.1 Individual Choice without Qualitative Discrimination

The Harean moral agent represents the key characteristics that we have observed in modern liberal ethical thought. The picture of the moral agent that emerges out of the Harean account is that of a person who is a rationally free agent and who ultimately makes a choice of principle of conduct unguided by any substantive criteria. Such a process of critical reasoning finally terminates in the plain assertion of some universal rule or principle for which no further justificatory reason can be

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

given. The process of justificatory reasoning comes to an end after the effects both of the individual's decision and of observing the principle are fully taken into account. Hare explicitly reiterates this point when he says,

if the inquirer still goes on asking 'But why should I live like that?' then there is no further answer to give him. ... We can only ask him to make up his own mind which way he ought to live; for in the end everything rests upon such a decision of principle. He has to decide whether to accept that way of life or not; if he accepts it, then we can proceed to justify the decisions that are based upon it; if he does not accept it, then let him accept that some other, and try to live by it.³⁶

What underlies such a moral theory is that the authoritative status accorded to the universal principles of moral conduct is ultimately conferred upon them by the choice of the moral agent. MacIntyre's words on this point are worth-quoting:

The utterance of any universal principle is in the end an expression of the preferences of an individual will and for that will its principles have and can have authority as it chooses to confer upon them by adopting them.³⁷

What kind of a moral agent, then, do we find in the Harean thesis? A moral agent who reasons for his own *personal preference*

³⁶ *Language of Morals*, p. 69.

³⁷ *After Virtue*, pp. 20-21.

satisfaction. Though Hare claims that the moral agent pays equal attention to the preferences of others, he, at the same time, wishes to let the moral agent free to form his own universal prescriptions in case his overall assessment of preferences so demands.

In the final run, as Keekok Lee's analysis of Hare's account points out,³⁸ the moral agent never faces real moral problems. At most, the moral agent, gets tied to those universal prescriptions in which the envisaged role reversal is not merely logically possible but highly probable. For example, the prescription, "I ought to pay my debts" will receive a high degree of consensus once the agent gets engaged in universalizing the above stated prescription. For it will be receiving the support of most of rational people, as almost everybody practically understands the implications of this prescription. Given the numerous practical situations of lending and borrowing, the critical thinking will indeed approve of such a prescription. It, however, means no more than that people would like to guard their respective self-interests. Lee says: "In this sense, the 'rationality' embedded in his method becomes indistinguishable from that of pursuing enlightened self-interest."³⁹

What follows from the above is the conclusion that the individual agent's own choice plays the supreme role in the matter of settling any conflict of values or preferences. And extreme individualism of this variety,

³⁸ *A New Basis for Moral Philosophy*, pp. 46-66.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

symptomatic as it is of modern moral philosophy as such, reduces the matter of moral legitimacy, or the legitimacy of any universalized prescription, to the ultimate discretion of the individual will or choice. Once the will expresses its decision to submit to the principle in the transparency of rational freedom, the principle in question is no longer amenable to endorsement by qualitative considerations. For no qualitative criteria, such as of values or virtues or the wisdom of a tradition, can supersede the ultimate authority of the individual will. The endorsement of the principle becomes the *formal* endorsement of the will.

Being part of the utilitarian tradition of modern moral philosophy, the Harean view also reduces our qualitative assessment of preferences or desires to a homogeneous medium. It is a medium where in classifying one's preferences one does not employ "the contrastive language of qualitative evaluation."⁴⁰ But the incommensurability of preferences is our usual predicament, which, contrary to what the utilitarians try to do, we cannot overcome by resorting to a homogeneous medium.

What we really need to introduce is the idea of "qualitative distinctions" in terms of which we are to endorse or reject desires or preferences. The qualitative distinctions enable us to recognize preferences as higher or lower, virtuous or vicious, noble or base and so

⁴⁰ Taylor, "Responsibility for Self", p. 115.

on.⁴¹ Unless we resort to qualitative criteria as determinants of the authoritativeness of ethical principles, we run the risk of licensing our will or individual choice to legitimize the authenticity of a moral principle.

Having seen certain problems that beset preference-satisfaction version of contemporary act-utilitarianism, we may go on to examine other theoretical alternatives of contemporary moral thinking in the liberal tradition. A foremost representative of such an alternative theory, which is an alternative to utilitarianism, is the deontological liberalism of Rawls. It is to this enormously influential theory that we may now turn.

2.3 Rawls: Deontological Liberalism

By drawing upon Kant's argument against the priority of the good over the right, contemporary liberal thinkers direct their criticism against utilitarianism. They contend that utilitarianism overlooks the fact of the individuality of the person as a free chooser having his own desires and goals. They allege that the utilitarianism, in their utility-maximizing principle of *person-indifferent* calculation of desires treat society as a single person and thereby conflates diverse desires of different people into a single system of desires.

As Kant famously proclaims, persons are citizens of the "Kingdom of Ends" the liberals are naturally emphatic on the claim that persons have

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-116.

their own desires and interests. The distinction and plurality of persons demand that they be treated in a way that is sensitive to personal particularities of desires and interests. But it is precisely the indifference to individual-sensitive considerations of desires and interests for the sake of "aggregate happiness" that leads to the morally repugnant consequence of treating persons as means to the maximization of total happiness.

By rejecting the utilitarian approach, the Kantian liberals maintain the primacy of individual liberties. These liberties are inviolable, in the sense that they cannot be sacrificed at the altar of general welfare. In other words, these liberties are not to be weighed against the calculus of political or social interests.

However, defenders of individual liberty disagree among themselves with respect to the limits of liberty, and consequently, also upon their preferred ideals of social and political organization. There are egalitarian liberals who favor the welfare economy, and approve of a scheme of liberties and rights, which are rights to welfare, education, health care and so on. Then there are libertarian liberals who defend market economy and consider the redistributive policies of welfare state as violative of the rights of people. They offer a scheme of civil liberties along with a strong defense of private property rights.

At any rate, whether egalitarian or libertarian, liberals begin with a common claim that we are distinct persons, have our own aims, interests and conceptions of the good. And they add that we aspire for a framework of rights that would enable us to realize our free moral being with a mutual regard for freedom of everyone. In conformity with this belief, they argue for neutrality among conceptions of the good as of central importance to any ethical system.

At the outset, it looks out of place to affirm liberties and rights without endorsing a particular vision of good life or granting priority to a certain end. Accordingly, the Kantian liberals propose a framework of rights which is neutral to various conceptions of good. They do this by asserting the primacy of the *right* over the *good*. In his most celebrated work *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls explicitly states:

We should ... reverse the relation between the right and the good proposed by teleological doctrines and view the right as prior.⁴²

Rawls shares the Kantian view that what really matters about we human beings is our capacity to set, pursue and revise our own conceptions of the good. Hence he contends that the regulative principles of society must not depend upon any particular conception of the

⁴² *A Theory of Justice*, p. 560.

good.⁴³ Persons have a highest-order interest in protecting this capacity and hence it is crucial to justice that no exception be made that may adversely affect the full and equal exercise by any person of this capacity freely to determine how he should live. In short, moral personhood consists most fundamentally in a person's capacity to freely choose his ends, and any just social order is that which is so organized as to accord privileged respect to this personhood. As Rawls puts it:

Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override.... the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.⁴⁴

Rawls contends that what is needed is a common judgment in respect of rights. It is in the interest of a well-ordered society to accord priority to the right over the good. For the principles of right establish *final ordering* among the conflicting claims of persons over one another. Whereas the individual's conception of the good is always marked by a particularity of socio-historical position having no concern for a common judgment.

Rawls's understanding of the person projects a distance between

⁴³ To secure such principles, Rawls introduces the ideas of "original position" and "veil of ignorance" to arrive at a just or fair organization of society. That is to imagine a situation where persons are denied knowledge of their social location and their natural endowments in order to arrive at the principles of justice to assign the basic liberties, rights and duties and to regulate the social and economic advantages.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

the identity of the person and his ends. Given this disparity, the self is individuated antecedently to its choice of ends. What this idea of the "antecedently individuated self" means is that the essential unity of the self is given prior to its ends. Rawls says that "the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it; even a dominant end must be chosen from among numerous possibilities."⁴⁵

2.3.1 A Communitarian Confutation

The argument behind Rawls's theory is that we call person's ends his ends because he chooses them. That implies there already is a self who chooses his ends and so the constitution of the self, that is to say its identity, is established prior to its choice of ends. In short, Rawls regards the human capacity to freely or autonomously choose his ends as a fundamental value. To fail to respect this fundamental value would be to fail to respect the fundamental feature of personhood. Since the choice of ends follows the antecedently individuated self, the ends can never become integral to the identity of the person. That would mean, no matter what the person may value in his life it can never affect his fixed and pure identity. As Michael Sandel elucidates the point:

No commitment could grip me so deeply that I could not understand myself without it. No transformation of life purposes and plans could be so unsettling as to disrupt the contours of my identity. No project could be so essential that

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 560.

turning away from it would call into question the person I am.⁴⁶

Thus according to Sandel, Rawlsian conception of person excludes the possibility of communal goods playing any constitutive role. For Rawls, a political community consists in an arrangement of benefits among mutually disinterested individuals. But the individuals are not expected to identify themselves with this arrangement. Nor does it include the possibility that individuals might develop and refine their identities through this arrangement.

It appears questionable whether one can plausibly conceive of a person's identity or individuation in complete independence of concrete socio-historical involvements. The very idea of a fully detached identity of a person rings fictitious. After all, to be a person at all is to be a member of a particular family or class or community or nation, as bearer of a specific history, as citizen of a particular republic. Besides, the person's identity is largely and centrally constituted by what he identifies himself with in his communal engagement.

It is in view of these considerations that we must appreciate Sandel's remark:

we cannot be wholly unencumbered subjects of possession, individuated in advance and given prior to our

⁴⁶ *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 62.

ends, but must be subjects constituted in part by our central aspirations and attachments, always open, indeed vulnerable, to growth and transformation in the light of revised self-understandings.⁴⁷

In an effort to conceive of an ideally free and rational agent, Kantian liberals insist upon the independence of the self. However, in the bargain, they end up imagining a person who has no character and moral depth. For a person with character is always fully aware of his projects, values and community that assign him his moral particularity. Whereas in the absence of constitutive elements the deontological self is left with no person. It rather represents a *shadowy* person.

If we are to pause here for a critical review of the anti-liberal criticisms of the Rawlsian theory of justice by Sandel, we would have to scrutinize the implications of Rawls's conception of "the original position" and "the veil of ignorance". The question is whether the hypothetical construct of the original position can justifiably be interpreted as presupposing an unacknowledged ontological hypothesis, as Sandel's critique does.

The metaphysical reading of this hypothesis is not incontrovertible. For one could argue that the structure of the original position only reflects Rawls's substantive view that social justice categorically requires that we regard our fellow citizens as free and equal. It

⁴⁷ "Justice and the Good", p. 166.

does not embody the further claim that one's identity as a person is metaphysically independent of his roles, character traits and life-ends at any particular time. Indeed, drawing any ontological import out of the picture of a person as a free and equal citizen portrayed in the original position would surely be unwarranted if the original position is interpreted as no more than a dramatic device argumentatively deployed in a political theory so as to drive home the point that, when thinking about social justice, we must refrain from letting our deliberations depend upon our knowledge of what our natural and social endowments and our value commitments really are.

The conception of the person modeled in the original position is only the conception of a citizen with freedom and equality as its in-built features; it is, strictly and fully, a *political* conception drawn out from the available resources of the public political culture. The political conception of the person as citizen need not presuppose the validity of any metaphysical or comprehensive doctrine of personhood. The political person represented in the original position is not erected out of an unencumbered subject, a shadowy self detached from all its ends. Presumably, the idea of the person as a free and equal citizen is entirely non-metaphysical, and it would therefore be quite consistent with whatever conception of personhood one upholds at the metaphysical level.

In short, the hypothesis of the original position, being exclusively

part of the argumentative structure of a political theory, does not permit it to be interpreted as embodying an essentialist conception of personhood. For the person as citizen is not, or at least it need not be, the person as *such*.

The political conception of the self is restricted to the domain of the political, and it is latent in the public political culture. It would therefore be wrong to view Rawls as holding that the individual, *qua* a member of the political community, has ontological priority over society. The status of the individual as a citizen does not entail anything about its ontological priority or otherwise in relation to society.

The above line of defense against the anti-liberal critics is developed by Rawls himself in some of his later writings.⁴⁸ He stresses the point that justice as fairness is "political not metaphysical" - the qualification here being intended as an argument to block off Sandel's charge that the Rawlsian theory of justice presupposes an incoherent metaphysics of personhood. In Rawls's words:

we adopt a conception of the person framed as part of, and restricted to, an explicitly political conception of justice. [And] persons can accept this conception of themselves as citizens and use it when discussing questions of political justice without being committed in other parts of their life to comprehensive moral ideals often associated with liberalism, for example, the ideals of autonomy and

⁴⁸ See "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical", and *Political Liberalism*.

individuality.⁴⁹

In other words, the self-conception involved in the public, political sphere is to be distinguished from, and can coexist with, quite different self-understandings and interests in other, non-political areas of life. Political self-understanding and self-identity are not to be seen as inevitably spilling over people's self-understanding and self-identity involved in contexts beyond the political.

It appears plausible to admit that Rawls's "political" move does seem to have adequate countervailing effect upon the arguments of his critics. But by making this strategic move of sharply demarcating the sphere of the political from that of the non-political and restricting the matters of social justice to the former, he seems to have created a new problem that makes questionable the conception of personhood. The new problem is whether it is plausible to think that people who are deeply committed to particular values or pursuits of life in the non-political areas, such as religion and art -- pursuits which may not themselves accord highest priority to the values of individual freedom or autonomy -- can nonetheless shift wholeheartedly to an understanding of themselves as citizens that does accord absolute priority to these values.

Such a possibility would require the person to be

⁴⁹ "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical", p. 245.

schizophrenically tied up with mutually conflicting values. At its worst, it would be a painful internal cleavage for them whose private non-political commitments seriously clash with the publicly available political conception, and who are nonetheless ultimately swayed by the latter because of its overriding primacy. Is this desirable at all?

A sharp separation between the political and the personal, between public and private morality, in the life of every individual is likely to affect the meaningful integrity of our lives. For our commitment to the political value of autonomy, required of us as citizens, may necessitate us to suspend or bracket some of our non-political or personal commitments which shape our identity. If citizenship is designed as a cloak we must put on for the sake of our political identity even at the cost of suppressing our most significant non-political identity, then such a design may be suspected to be *unfair*. It means that the exclusionary political concept of justice as fairness may itself be unfair.

2.4 General Remarks

The liberal individualist tradition of moral and political ideology rests on a basic contention that the human situation is fundamentally, and metaphysically, one of discrete individuals who are ultimately asocial and mutually disinterested selves. Such mutually disinterested, or essentially self-interested beings enter into social engagement from the outside, as it were, and live with one another only because of individual expediency and

convenience. Morality is a matter entirely of the individual self's good will or conscience, and a matter of the individual self's judging freely what is a good end of life's pursuit.

All values are individual values; and even the so-called social value of utilitarianism, namely greatest happiness for the greatest number, is ultimately a calculated projection of the satisfaction of particular individuals on to the satisfaction of maximum number of such individuals. There is no room for what is an ultimately social locus of either political or moral value. It is questionable whether the basic contention of liberal individualism, and the moral theory it upholds, is at all plausible. It seems, from the comments of the preceding paragraphs, that that contention is vulnerable to many criticisms. For one thing, that contention blatantly overlooks the fact that, whether it is a demand for individual liberty and rights, or the stress on self-legislation, or the urge for non-interference (i.e. tolerance), they all can make sense only in a *social* context. In other words, all such claims can sustain their respective grounds only against the background of society. And this means that the social, rather than being an artificial construct of individuals intrinsically possessed of rights and liberties, is the actual locus only within which individual rights and liberties, and the various modes of life in which these are fulfilled, can be meaningfully practiced.

Chapter Three

From Rightful Doing to Worthy Living

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to argue for a judicious transition of the moral point of view from the perspective of rightful doing to that of worthy living. It is only such a perspectival transition that makes possible the transfiguration of morality within the human life of narrative unity and integrity.

3.1 On Acting as a Righteous Agent

The preceding discussion has brought to light the limitations of the notion of morality which treats the question "what ought I to do?" as a central moral question. The main thrust of moral thinking in the liberal individualist tradition is that the individual moral agent himself shoulders the final burden of making a moral decision - a decision that issues from his pure will after it goes through the rational procedures of thought. Ultimately, the will of the individual agent is found to exercise its decision-making power in

independence of any qualitative criteria. For the will of the liberal individual is primarily detached from the encumbrances of tradition and socially transmitted criteria of moral evaluation.

What is implied in taking the question, "What ought I to do?", as central to morality is the autonomy of reason, which means reason on its own has to provide an answer to the question. But when reason is to function in independence of any substantive conception of an ideal life, it inevitably becomes wholly procedural. The rationality of the agent consists in following a method and the value of such rationality is assessed independently of the substantive worth of values that it may produce. Evaluations of practical rationality, officially at least, gets divorced from any conception of the good or invocation of values. As the emphasis is on a certain method or style of one's reasoning and not the conclusions that it produces, accordingly the rationality of the agent turns out to be a way of giving primacy to the agent's desires and will. In other words, it is a way of highlighting the importance of free and autonomous choice.¹

One of the striking expressions of this approach to human life is a twofold classification of human actions: morally right or wrong actions and morally indifferent actions. What underlies this twofold classification of actions is a basic dichotomy, and a pervasive one, that liberal ethical

¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 85-86.

theories accept, namely the division of human life into situations that are either moral or non-moral.

Hence, the agent faces the question, "what ought I to do?" in a typical *moral* situation. Thus, there may also be non-moral situations where the agent is not supposed to put on a cloak that prescribes *against stepping on the toes of the other person*. By modern standards, we may find various examples of situations where human beings make non-moral choices like, what profession to pursue, what books to read, what friends to cultivate and so forth.

We may, however, not find this distinction in some cases. For example, Bentham's universal principle of conduct, namely "greatest happiness of the greatest number," exhorts a person to follow it on all occasions. But unlike this strong version of utilitarianism, a large number of modern ethical theories, be that of Mill or of Rawls, maintain the distinction on various grounds. Mill explicitly states:

It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them; but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the contrary, ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives, and rightly so done, if the rule of duty does not condemn them.²

² *Utilitarianism*, p. 205.

Thus Mill clearly intends to restrain the workings of the utilitarian principle so that it may not infringe upon individual autonomy. For it is not possible at all to attend to the principle on all occasions, that is to seek to produce maximum happiness of maximum number and also to seek to diminish pain. If it were so, we would be morally culpable in reading a newspaper or even attending to the needs of our family because we may instead do other things to promote general happiness or reduce pain in the world.

On similar grounds, Kant's categorical imperative has been reformulated in such a manner that its area of operation gets reduced to the minimum. For instance, a moral agent, while making a choice to become a philosophy teacher, cannot will that everyone in his situation decide to become a philosophy teacher. Instead of tackling this issue on substantive grounds, the liberal ethicists, however, wriggle out of this problem by pushing the vocational choice into the domain of non-moral choices.³

At this stage, however, we may justifiably wonder why, after all, this distinction has come to prevail in the modern understanding of morality. We find the answer in Norton, who explains the cause of this distinction in the following manner:

³ "Moral Minimalism and the Development of Moral Character", p. 183.

The proliferation of non-moral domains of refuge from morality comes home to roost when the so-called private sector, which Mill (in his eudaimonistic voice) fought for as a sanctuary for the self-development of moral character, becomes regarded instead as an arena for the gratification of desires that are relieved of any obligation to answer for their worth. Self-development is arduous (albeit deeply rewarding) work, and private life has become, for many, the playground for mindless diversions from the public workplace.⁴

Alongside these repercussions that the distinction between moral and non-moral leads to, the question, "what ought I to do?" does not afford the moral life a full-blown space for aspiration. For, in any case, the narrow domains of a moral life of an agent depends heavily upon the following of a simple method of *rule-application* which in turn does not leave much scope for self-development of moral character. Norton believes that "an important consequence of this has been to redirect human aspirations away from the confines of morality and toward the apparently limitless horizons afforded by the laboratory and the market."⁵

Unlike the traditional stress on the idea of an overall good life, the liberal ethical concern is with life taken as consisting of bits and pieces of individual decisions and actions. That is to say, the question,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁵ *Ibid.* According to Norton, the distinction between moral and non-moral situations provides an access to persons, institutions and practices to move over to non-moral domain and he identifies in this respect two most influential areas, namely the laboratory and the market.

"what ought I to do?" involves the immediate present and it has no bearing whatsoever upon the agent's past or future. For, the liberal ethicist expects the agent, while dealing with the question, to identify the moral context of the situation first, and subsequently to look for the relevant rule or principle for application that directly or indirectly promotes a universal principle of conduct. Suppose, for example, an agent finds himself caught in a situation, whether he ought to tell the police that a friend of his, who is alleged to have committed a crime, is hiding in his house. He is obligated by morality (backed by legality) to follow the rule, "Always tell the truth,".

Thus, the problem is solved by arriving at a covering rule. The covering rule in turn gets supported by a universal principle of conduct. And this is what liberal ethicists do - formulating a universal principle of conduct. The examples are many: Hobbes's natural right of self-preservation, Kant's categorical imperative, Bentham's greatest happiness of greatest number, Hare's universalizability principle of preference satisfaction, and Rawls's two principles of justice.⁶

Thus, here morality is seen as a law-like set of principles that govern our actions.⁷ Whether we perform our action out of respect for the moral law or to produce the greatest overall good, it all amounts to acting in

⁶ Norton, *ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷ Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy".

accordance with a universal principle of conduct. That universal principle of conduct then becomes the beaconing light for generating answers to the key moral question: "what ought I to do?"

In view of this, the moral agent looks upon the relevance of the question altogether in a different light. Though he works out the implications of the question, those implications remain tied to the situation at hand. Like in the previous example, the decision to inform the police - that is to tell the truth - has got nothing to do with the other factors of his life, such as the kind of life that the agent is living, or aspires to live.

Further, the moral agent, while grappling with another moral situation, is not supposed to look for a possible relation among the two, except maintaining consistency and impersonality. Other than that, factors like, in what way these situations may affect the contours of human identity, or the direction of human life, become extraneous to moral inquiry. It largely happens because the practical rationality of the agent is procedural and not substantive in nature, which is why he is not in a position to work continually for a conception of a good life. Thus, liberal morality is reflective of an atomistic relation between morality and life. It is the morality of discrete, particular acts of life, rather than that of life as a whole.

It is to be noted that the discrete, particular acts, which fall under the purview of the modern liberal conception of morality, are *non-communal* and *ahistorical* in nature. That is to say, they do not presuppose any "setting" - a term that MacIntyre employs to stress the socio-historical features of human activity⁸ - which is a necessary condition of understanding human acts. Instead, here the agent makes a moral choice by taking into consideration the formal relation that he conceives of between the situation at hand and the relevant rule.

Thus, these moral acts - which are the logical outcome of a moral choice - appear so disparate that the agent finds it hard to comprehend the shape of his moral life in respect of its unity, depth and coherence. For there are many non-moral acts in the life of such an agent which intercept between moral acts and thereby affect the possibility of an ethical narrative structure in that life.

3.2 On Being a Good Person

It is at this point that a crucial difference between the liberal moral theory and its ancient counterpart needs to be highlighted. Unlike the liberal moral theory, ancient moral theory does not distinguish between the human life *as such* and the human *moral* life. Human life as a whole, and not just certain acts or moments of it, embodies moral meaning according to the classical view. The moral aspect of life cannot, in this view, be construed

⁸ *After Virtue*, p. 206.

as set apart, and constantly disrupted by, the non-moral aspect. Rather, moral meaning can be ascribed to the life as a whole - life conceived of as a certain kind of narrative unity. It is precisely this feature of ancient moral theory which finds its neo-classical reformulation in the ethical theory of MacIntyre. Talking about the narrative unity of a human life in the context of life's ethical meaning, MacIntyre says that the unity of a life "resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life as narrative beginning to middle to end."⁹

In contrast, the liberal moral theory construes human morality as a separate, autonomous sphere to be sharply demarcated from the non-moral sphere. Consequently, the moral agent cannot be seen here as capable of adjusting his moral moments with the rest of life in order to yield a unitary human life. For the non-moral would always disrupt the moral dimension and would thereby be the cause of disunity.

One must view the significance of the question, "what ought I to do?" against the background of the disunity of life explicated above. This moral question is inevitably addressed to a specific situation of life discreetly circumscribed as a *moral* situation, whereby the situation is pulled apart, so to speak, from the so-called non-moral contexts of the agent's overall life.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Apparently, then, the key moral question, "what ought I to do?" belittles the seriousness of the relation between morality and life. For it limits the concern of morality to resolve the dilemma in a typical moral situation in independence of the role that such a dilemma may play in carrying out the search for a conception of the good human life.

Hence the more serious way of addressing ourselves to the moral question is, "how should I live?" However, that does not imply an exclusive distinction between the two questions. Rather, our interest lies in changing the focus of emphasis so that we may show that there is no need to develop a criterion by which to identify a particular moral situation. Instead, it is to be realized that the object of morality is the whole life - life in its full unity.

One might suggest here that this alternative outlook on morality is *holistic* in character. The implied holism signifies the point that being moral is not so much a matter of being an agent of rightful doing as it is a matter of being a person of worthy living. It is the appropriate pursuit of a worthy life, characterized by the values incorporated within a conception of what is a worth-living life, that becomes the center stage of morality.

If we are to articulate such an alternative, holistic ethical theory, we must resort to a detailed examination of the structure of moral agency. Our immediate task therefore would be to spell out the constitutive conditions of personhood that lend to a person's being a fit subject of moral agency. It is to this task that our next chapter is devoted.

Chapter Four

Conditions of Moral Personhood

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter we shall explore the idea of moral personhood as part of a general account of an ethical theory. Specifically, we shall address ourselves to the issue of what is constitutive of the concept of moral agency and, in this connection, argue that the possibility of a moral life for the agent is coextensive with the possibility of the agent's living a virtuous life. This argument will embody an account of what we may call the essentially constitutive conditions of moral personhood. They are: self-conscious rationality, valuational consciousness, and the personal stance. In what follows, we shall elaborate each of them.

4.1 The Concept of a Person

Whatever may be the general conceptual complexity of the relation between

being a human being and being a person, it is sufficient for the particular concern of an ethical theory to say that humans have the capacity to *become* persons. A morally relevant account of human nature and human flourishing presupposes a connection between being human and being a person. Human flourishing in ethically relevant sense implies that the human individual sincerely engages in the task of attaining moral personhood. And it is undeniable that the attaining of moral personhood is almost synonymous with the actualization of a virtuous life, so long as a virtuous life is considered to be essentially a good life.

Being a virtuous man, in the above sense, would be an inalienable part of being a person. In other words, a theory of what is ethically good for man would ideally include an account of what it is to be a person. Otherwise the ethical theory would be highly counter-intuitive. On this Casey aptly remarks:

Any attempt to describe the good for man which has nothing to say about what it is to be a person, if it gives rise to an ethical theory at all, is likely to issue only in a supremely crude utilitarianism.¹

There are philosophers like Kant and Hegel who derive their ethical theories from the concept of a person. They invoke certain conditions of personhood as necessary for the possibility of morality.

¹ Casey, *Pagan Virtue*, p. 1.

The conscious being has a life of awareness *for* itself. The organism, because of its consciousness or awareness, is a being-for-itself rather than a being-in-itself. And to say that any experience is experience for someone is as much true of a bat as of an infant or an adult human being.

What perhaps is distinctive of humans is a *grade* of subjecthood that contains propositional attitudes (experiential or non-experiential) which have representational content, such as beliefs, desires, emotions, intentions and the like. It may be noted that the property of consciousness is extrinsic to a propositional attitude because of the possibility of unconscious propositional attitudes.³ Whereas it necessarily is intrinsic to sensations as these mental states occur only consciously.

4.2.2 Self-consciousness

In the present context, we may drive home the point that a person, before giving reasons for his actions and thoughts, *gets accustomed* to his mental states. That is to say, the occurrence of various mental states, whether painful or pleasurable, saddening or joyful - is also accompanied by a subsequent reflective awareness of the characteristic nature of these states. And this reflective awareness sets the mind ready to

³ On this, however, there may be difference of opinion. See, for instance, Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*.

recognize these states and to adjust itself to a mode of life which amounts to an appropriate response to such states.

This getting accustomed, though sharable with other living beings at a primitive level, refers to a kind of awareness which is peculiar to humans in the sense that it refers to a complex power to comprehend one's mental states in relation to the world. That is to say, this peculiar awareness enables him to comprehend the basic human reality, which is that his mental being is always in the making. The human reality is a dynamic, transformative structure of existence in that the human mental condition ceaselessly undergoes modifications of beliefs, intentions, attitudes and desires. As a being for itself, the human subject makes and remakes itself through such attitudinal transformations.

While the reflexivity of consciousness is that by virtue of which humans are aware of their own mental states, there is the further feature of consciousness, namely its *reflectivity*, by dint of which the subject estimates the forming and functioning of his mental life.

However, a person does not face the normative question, "how should one live?" with regard to everything that he observes about himself. As for instance, he may observe that he is mortal, which of itself falls outside the purview of moral inquiry. But the type of belief that he forms in relation to this observation is relevant. For it is only beliefs,

intentions, attitudes, and desires and the like that appear problematic and a person's response to these reveals what reasons, ideals and values he holds about his observations.

4.2.3 Rationality

The component of rationality gets introduced with the onset of propositional mental states. Unlike sensations which occur at a primitive level of development, propositional attitudes are acquired at a later stage of cognitive development. The attribution of beliefs and desires to a person allows us to make rational sense of his doings. And that sense significantly differs from the sense that we make while attributing sensations to a subject. Colin McGinn states the distinction:

When we explain a person's behavior by attributing propositional attitudes to the person we represent the behavior as rational from the person's point of view (that is, his set of beliefs and desires); but when we explain behavior by ascribing sensations to a creature we are not yet in the realm of explanation by reasons but are merely exhibiting a pattern of (non-rational) cause and effect. As a consequence, the need to represent a creature's propositional attitudes as rationally related one to another, the whole forming a (relatively) coherent web, has no real analogue in the ascription of sensations: there is nothing like propositional content to confer logical relations between sensations, and hence no normative constraint shaping the pattern of sensations a creature may exemplify.⁴

⁴ *The Character of Mind*, p. 9.

The meaning of rationality, so far as it appears in the above stated distinction, consists in having a coherent web of propositional attitudes. This internal coherence not only allows others to ascribe explanatory reasons to a person, but the person concerned can in turn offer reasons which he considers are responsible for his actions.

While one aspect of the reflective rationality of a person is its concern for the maintenance or preservation of formal consistency or coherence of various propositional attitudes, there is another aspect of it which pertains to the rational assessment of his overall mental life in terms of substantive criteria.

The practical, substantive rationality manifests itself in two conceptually different domains, namely a) the domain that relates to the ethical legitimacy of an end, and b) the domain that relates to the instrumentality of actualizing the legitimated end. We might call them, respectively, *normative* and *pragmatic* rationality. While alternative ends are evaluated as worthy or unworthy by reference to normative standards, alternative courses of action in relation to those ends are pragmatically chosen in terms of their *appropriateness*.

Substantive rationality as involving the normative and the pragmatic aspects is itself evaluative in nature. To the extent that human

consciousness is rational in the above sense, a human person is characteristically conscious of the distinction between, on the one hand, living a life of mere gratification of desires, and, on the other, living a life directed at certain valued ends. And being aware of this distinction implies that a human person is typically endowed with what we might call *valuational consciousness*.

4.3 Valuational Consciousness

To ascribe valuational consciousness to a person would mean that he is conscious not only of himself but also of the world and other persons in terms of a set of values. There is, on his part, a value-sensitive appreciation of the circumstances and ends of his life. He thus makes judicious discriminations amongst alternative courses of action and alternative ends of life.

4.3.1 Wanting as Valuing

A human being may live a life that consists of the satisfaction of anything that he wants to have. His actions would all spring from his occurrent desires. But such a life may be discredited because many of these desires may, on reflection, be found to be unworthy of being satisfied. Alternatively, a life may be lived in which desires are evaluated before being satisfied. In such a life the source of action is not just occurrent desires, but a compelling sense of what is valued. Here a particular desire is satisfied because it is appraised as worth satisfying.

If we are to conceptualize these two sources of action under certain categories, we might say that the former source is *non-rational* and the latter *rational*. It is this mode of conceptualization that Gary Watson resorts to in the context of theorizing on the idea of free agency.⁵ Watson locates the source of this distinction in the ancient Greek thought - in particular Plato - wherein humans are believed to follow two guiding principles. One principle refers to an innate desire for pleasure while the other an acquired judgment that informs what is good and worth while.⁶

It is one thing to want or desire a state of affairs and another to judge it good and assign value to it. In the former case, one wants *what* one desires and in the latter, one wants *what* one values.⁷ It is true that in both cases one wants a certain state of affairs to obtain. But the reasons that prompt a person to bring about those states of affairs vary significantly. In this connection, Watson says:

It is because valuing is essentially related to thinking or judging good that it is appropriate to speak of the wants that are (or perhaps arise from) evaluations as belonging to, or originating in, the rational (that is, judging) part of the soul: values provide reasons for action. The contrast is with desires, whose objects may not be thought good and which are thus, in a natural sense, blind or irrational. Desires are mute on

⁵ "Free Agency".

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98. Here Watson means by "want" which covers any motivational factor that may figure in the explanation of intentional action and his use of the expression "desire" mainly occurs in connection with appetites and passions.

the questions of what is good.⁸

Thus *valuing* and *desiring* represent two independent motivational sources of action. What one wants may not be what one strongly desires. Watson says that "what one desires may not be what one values, and what one most values may not be what one is finally moved to get."⁹ Therefore, it may well be the case that a person desires a state of affairs without assigning any value to it. However, more often than not it so happens that a person does assign some value to what is desired. But, the moot point is that simply on the basis of the strength of one's desire, one cannot determine the degree to which the object of desire is being valued. In a given situation, one may not consider a particular object of desire to be most valuable, and yet his desire for that object may be most intense.

It is important to note here that the distinction between valuing and desiring is not in terms of the *content* of the wants. "The distinction in question has rather to do with the source of the want or with its role in the total 'system' of the agent's desires and ends. It has to do with why the agent wants what he does."¹⁰

Appetites and passions by their very nature generate desires

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

whose being and pursuit are independent of a person's evaluative judgment regarding what is or is not good. Of course, there often are what Watson calls "acculturated desires" which too are independent of a person's evaluations. Thus, for example, one may desire to avoid divorce even if he has no convincing reason to continue his marriage.

Though acculturated desires appear more like evaluations, they in fact lack sustained valuational elements. "Acculturated attitude may seem more akin to evaluation than to appetite in that they are often expressed in evaluative language ('divorce is wicked') and result in feelings of guilt when one's actions are not in conformity with them. But, since conflict is possible here, to want something as a result of acculturation is not thereby to value."¹¹ To attribute wanting-as-valuing to a person presupposes that he is inclined to act in accordance with his values, which, as Watson contends,

consist in those principles and ends which he - in a cool and non-self-deceptive moment - articulates as definitive of the good, fulfilling, and defensible life.... we all have more or less long-term aims and normative principles that we are willing to defend. It is such things as these that are to be identified with our values.¹²

Thus, the very purpose of attending to the source of wants is to work

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹² *Ibid.*.

for *reflective convergence* between what one values and what one desires. But what is it that would bring about the required convergence? Clearly, it is brought only when one's desires are rationally brought under the governance of values that one holds that such a convergence can be achieved. This, in turn, would require the person to have recourse to certain substantive evaluative criteria to discriminate amongst various desires.

The nature of such an evaluative engagement needs to be spelled out. Here we would invoke the illuminating ideas of Charles Taylor on what he describes as "strong evaluation".

4.3.2 Strong Evaluation

Existential self-questioning is a distinctive feature of persons. Their existing desires and goals are often subjected to self-examination. Reiterating this point, Taylor avers that "beyond the *de facto* characterization of the subject by his goals, desires, and purposes, a person is a subject who can pose the *de jure* question: is this the kind of being I ought to be, or really want to be?"¹³

In other words, humans can evaluate and subsequently shape their being, or mode of life. Because of this capacity, which is considered to be essential to the notion of a person, humans are said to be *responsible* for

¹³ "Responsibility For Self", p. 281.

what they are.

It may be said that non-human subjects of action and desire also have the capacity to evaluate. For example, a dog evaluates its food positively. But, in the human case, we are concerned with *reflective* evaluation, that is evaluation of desires themselves, which a dog is not capable of.

Reflective evaluation can also be *weak* or *strong*. In the weak sense, an agent reflects over his desires so as to determine what is convenient to him. He makes the desired changes on the grounds of "incompatible contingency" of desires. For instance, one, who is addicted to sweets, comes to a stage when he questions the desire to eat sweets. In this process, he realizes its bad effects for health and so on. At this stage, he desires not to desire sweets. Now this is what we normally expect from what Taylor calls a "simple evaluator".

In the strong sense, a person's reflection upon his first-order desires is not governed by what would lead to a convenient end, but by a set of *values* which overrides any matters of convenience. Accordingly, a person evaluates his desires in terms of their being virtuous or vicious, higher or lower, and noble or base, that correspond to different modes of life, such as integrated or fragmented and saintly or merely human.

The ability to engage in strong evaluation is not just a necessary condition of moral agency. Indeed, it is central to, and constitutive of, being a person as such. This non-contingency of the practice of strong evaluation is

not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings, which could perhaps turn out one day not to hold for some exceptional individual or new type, some superman of disengaged objectification. Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.¹⁴

Whereas weak evaluation is engendered merely by the agent's consideration of the contingent advantages and disadvantages of desires, strong evaluation is firmly founded upon the discrimination of desires on qualitative grounds. That is to say, strong evaluations are not a matter of immediate convenience and expediency, but a matter of reasoned commitment to what is deemed qualitatively superior. For they involve "discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged."¹⁵

¹⁴ *Sources of the Self*, p. 27.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Another point of distinction between weak and strong evaluation is that, while in former case whatever is desired is *prima facie* good, in the latter case that which is actually desired can still be evaluatively discredited as undesirable, i.e. as bad, base, vicious etc. For instance, a person controls his impulse to refrain from committing an unjust act. He does this not to make some other desired act possible but simply because he believes it to be vicious.

The strong evaluator aspires to be a certain kind of person and he does not want to compromise the adopted mode of life by doing, say, unjust act. A person who acts justly, for instance, understands the meaning of justice and honor. He resists the immediate desires to improve on the worth of his life. Here it is not limited by the consideration of how to fulfill desires, but how to bring in a qualitative change in his life. He does not opt for the unjust act because he wants to be a just and honorable human being.

Thus strong evaluation, or rather strong self-evaluation, involves a deep concern with a certain range of values which are informed by what is considered to be a virtuous life. These values draw their sustenance from a range of predominant virtues like courage, justice, kindness, friendship, love, benevolence, practical wisdom and so on. Whenever first-order desires are found to be generative of actions or intentions which are in conflict with what the agent takes to be the parameters of a

virtuous life, he tries to form second-order desires in consonance with certain virtues so as to transform his own identity as a person. He strives to become that desired person who would naturally or spontaneously desire to do that which would be a virtuous act.

What makes a self-evaluation *strong* is the fact that the occasion for such an evaluation is a momentous one compared to the more ordinary self-evaluations the agent might make from time to time. The occasions of strong self-evaluation are moments of a radical decision making. For if the predominant virtues are to shape the agent's life or identity, these would lay strict demands upon the inner life of the agent. Whether it is justice, courage, friendship or temperance, the internalization of each virtue would require the agent to engage in an uncompromisingly sincere striving. It would be a life of ceaseless cultivation of virtuous dispositions, so that the effort actually culminates in the agent's coming naturally to experience his agency as sufficiently shaped by the intended dispositions.

What underlies the notion of valuational consciousness is that there is a normative phenomenology which defines personhood. A person exists as a person only in relation to another person, who in turn has personal existence only in relation to the former. And this relational nexus is defined by certain evaluative attitudes which persons have towards one another. There is thus a personal reciprocity of value-laden stances that sustains the very possibility of personhood.

4.4 The Personal Stance

Persons exist in a space which is created by individual's adoption of a personal stance towards one another. This person-constitutive stance implies, in Daniel Dennett's words, that "it is not the case that once we have established the objective fact that something is a person we treat him or her or it in a certain way, but that our treating him or her or it in **this** certain way is somehow and to some extent constitutive of its being a person."¹⁶

Apart from the unquestionable role of rationality *vis-à-vis* valuational consciousness, the moral life depends on the presence of a complicated web of various self-regarding and other-regarding attitudes. On this point we can do no better than draw upon P.F. Strawson's most poignant and elaborate portrayal of the personal stance, defined in terms of what he calls the "reactive attitudes", in his famous paper "Freedom and Resentment". Strawson maintains that reactive attitudes form the basis of interpersonal relations, for they are "the non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other."¹⁷

These attitudes basically signify "involvement" and "attachment", the notions which weave the thread of moral life. And their absence reflects

¹⁶ Dennett, "Conditions of Personhood", pp. 177-78.

¹⁷ "Freedom and Resentment", p. 62.

quite predictably "human isolation".¹⁸ For the study of beliefs involved in having these attitudes and feelings - which occur as part of our having these attitudes enables us to comprehend the truth in our *moral or human existence*.

Reactive attitudes like gratitude, resentment, moral indignation and the feelings of love and hurt constitute the entire human fabric of interpersonal relationships. In fact, the complex network of these human interactions constitutes the moral life. It is in and through these attitudes that human beings participate in a social world. For these attitudes are directly expressive of the status of human beings as free and responsible agents, since they are "indissolubly linked with that sense of agency or freedom or responsibility which we feel in ourselves and attribute to others."¹⁹ We would not be the human persons that we are but for our integration into the reciprocal attitudinal framework of human intersubjectivity. Graham Nerlich virtually makes the same point when he says: "Having reciprocal personal attitudes lies deep in the state of being a person."²⁰

Thus the personal stance is constituted by the reactive attitudes - attitudes in virtue of which we are engaged with one another in a non-detached way. In contrast, there is the *objective attitude*, to adopt which

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁹ Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism*, p. 31.

²⁰ *Values and Valuing*, p. 5.

towards another human being is, according to Strawson,

to see him, perhaps as an object of social policy; as a subject of what, in a wide range of senses, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken into account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed, or handled, or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided... If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to quarrel or reason with him.²¹

Granted that the pertinent viewpoint is that of the reactive attitude when it comes to judging persons as persons, it does not imply that it is *a/ways* impertinent to adopt the objective attitude whatsoever the human circumstances may be. On the contrary, the participant attitudes sometimes rightly tend to give place to non-participant attitudes, especially when the agent is understood to be incapable of participating in ordinary adult human relationships, whether because of being a young child, or because of being much too deranged. Strawson also talks about the pertinence of adopting the objective attitude towards the normal and the mature as a way of taking refuge from, say, the strains of involvement, or simply out of intellectual curiosity.

The case of the neurotic, who becomes virtually unfit for human

²¹ "Freedom and Resentment", p. 66.

intercourse with other persons, is particularly relevant to the question of why our withdrawal of the reactive attitude, and the adoption of the objective attitude, towards him is the right stance. Here taking this stance is motivated by our desire to bring about a change in the neurotic patient which will enable him to re-enter the normal life of participation, of full reciprocity of the reactive attitudes. Shifting to the objective attitude on our part with regard to the patient is prompted by our genuine concern that the patient be cured, so that the strategically chosen objective stance can be withdrawn and we return to the reactive stance.

It would follow from the account that the occasional and strategic departure from the reactive to the objective attitude under special circumstances is itself rooted in a second-order reactive attitude that any human being deflected from the interpersonal attitudinal space ought to be brought back into the sphere of full reciprocity of reactive attitudes. The reactive attitude, which defines the personal stance, therefore *overrides* any switch-over to the objective attitude, such that there is no genuine human possibility of our being entirely overtaken by the objective attitude.

Further still, while other-regarding reactive attitudes constitute the cement of *inter*-personal relationship and thus characterize the social dimension of human morality, there are self-regarding attitudes which play a vital role in the possibility of *intra*-personal moral development, or in what

may be described as the *individual dimension* of morality. What is crucial to these self-attitudes is their normative character and their role in the agent's developmental attempt to attain moral personhood. The normative self-attitudes are extremely significant because they very clearly indicate what is central to human personhood. And in this centrality of human personhood also lies the importance of the individual dimension of human morality.

4.5 General Remarks

In view of the above stated considerations, we may ascribe moral agency to a person who is a value-sensitive rational being occupying the inter-subjective space of reciprocal personal stance. Evidently, to say that a person has valuational consciousness is to stress the normative elements which are built into personal consciousness. And to that extent we may say that a person is a normative being. For to be a person is essentially to strive continually to attain an *ideal* of personhood.

In striving for the ideal of personhood, one cultivates or develops various virtuous dispositions like practical reason, courage, intelligence, wit, justice, temperance, friendship, forgiveness, humility, and so forth. These dispositions are necessary to strengthen one's capacity for reflective convergence of what one desires with what one values - convergence of what may be described as the motivational system and the evaluative system of the person. The attainment of this convergence in the life of a person makes him what may be termed a wise or virtuous person.

Chapter Five

Beyond Moral Minimalism: Towards a Theory of Moral Wisdom

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, we shall discuss the minimalist stance of liberal conception of moral personhood. Alongside, we shall explore the developmental aspects of moral personhood with a view to highlighting the comprehensiveness of the idea of the moral person. Emphasis on the developmental character of moral personhood will lead to a conception of moral wisdom, in which the virtue of selflessness is asserted to be a uniquely fundamental constituent of human moral personality.

5.1 Liberal Minimalism

Our deliberations in the preceding chapter have stressed that a person possesses the potentiality to become a value-sensitive rational being occupying the intersubjective space of reciprocal personal stance. But

the fact that a person has this potentiality does not accord well with the main objective of liberal moral theory. For the objective of liberal moral theory is to guide a person out of his moral problem or quandary. It embodies formalist models of practical reasoning that are supposed to yield absolutely definitive, objective, and universally applicable solutions to moral problems. Besides, it also seeks to specify features that determine the contours of moral problems.

Thus the whole structure of liberal moral theory demonstrates a procedure to solve a moral problem in a specific manner and that too in narrowly demarcated situations. By contrast, the sort of moral theory advocated by us is not procedural and context-specific. For what is central to this theory is that a moral person, as a value-sensitive rational being, is mainly concerned, not with "what ought I to do, here and now?", but with "how should I live a worthwhile human life?" And the moral person seeks to find an answer to the latter question in fairly unrestricted terms. Indeed, to project a moral person as an agent who performs discrete moral acts in what are restrictively considered to be "moral situations" is to belittle the person's moral potential.

In accordance with its problem-solving objective, liberal moral theory assigns priority to the question "what ought I to do?" This primacy of this question involves, as Anscombe argues, a law conception of morality¹ which

¹ "Modern Moral Philosophy".

in turn requires recognition of a divine law giver. But it sustains its relevance in the Kantian and Utilitarian versions of liberal moral theory despite the fact that these versions have lost their touch with the commands of divine law. They straightforwardly rely on the argument that right action is the one performed from a sense of duty or to maximize utility.

Divorced from the belief in the authority of a divine lawgiver, these simplified versions of moral theory seek to grasp the unity and purpose of following the "ought" on the basis of human conduct. Consequently they place *minimal* moral demands upon humans. For they define the moral dimension of human condition to consist in the riddance of conflict of interests and scarcity.

According to Pincoffs,² this configuration of liberal morality is built upon "Hobbesian truism" which says that in the absence of rules and rule-abiding conduct it would be unbearable for persons to live. Consequently, morality constituted of a set of rules turns out to be a subsidiary of positive law. And in that perspective it suits the liberal moral theorists to suggest the construction of simple and straightforward rules as they are supposed to be followed by everyone. But then, acting in accordance with those rules places minimal demands on a person, or we may say, on the developmental aspects of a person.³ The moral quest of a person is

² *Quandaries and Virtues*, p. 58.

³ Norton discusses the minimalist argument in his seminal essay, "Moral Minimalism and the Development of Moral Character".

fulfilled in resolving "moral problems" by applying a suitable principle of conduct. There is, therefore, no scope for an enduring moral striving, on the part of a person, that would constitute a sustained moral development through the entire span of his life.

All versions of liberal moral theory, including its various contemporary shades - contractarianism, deontology, utilitarianism, intuitionism, ideal observer theory - confirm the Hobbesian truism. They all articulate simple rules such as "Do not lie", "Do not steal", "Keep your promises", "Do not commit murder" and the like. They are deemed to follow from some universal principle of conduct like maximization of happiness or the categorical imperative or the principle of universal prescriptivism. Becoming a moral person simply means acting in accordance with these rules. As these rules are directed towards the preservation of social order. The preservation of social order thus overshadows the need to actualize one's potential as a value sensitive rational being. However, as a result, their concern to devise methods to preserve social order overshadows the need to actualize one's potential as a value-sensitive rational being. Nerlich has a clear statement on this:

The ground-floor problems of value for persons do not lie in which acts to perform but in which life to lead; the basic practical question is not what one shall *do* but what one shall *be*.(emphasis added)⁴

⁴ *Values and Valuing*, p. 16.

Attending to the question, "what one shall be", requires what Norton calls "a transformative difference in emphasis"⁵ so as to arrive at an account befitting of humans' moral potentiality. It is not the Hobbesian truism but the "Socratic truism" which assigns the paramount importance to the *psychic harmony* in the life of a person which is truly sensitive to man's moral potentiality. It is to allude to this that Socrates in *Gorgias* says:

What would even a person of little intelligence be more concerned about than this: how should one live?⁶

5.2 Grounds of Minimalism

Why is such a transformative difference not possible within the framework of liberal moral theory? Is it that the idea of moral striving defined in terms of strong evaluation can have no place within such a framework? It is to this question that we must turn immediately so as to pave the way for a fuller account of moral personhood.

The idea of evaluation is of course general enough to fit into any moral theory. Therefore, the liberal moral theory can definitely be expounded in terms of this idea. For example, when a person is facing a morally conflictual situation, he can exercise his evaluative judgment so

⁵ "Moral Minimalism and the Development of Moral Character", p. 180.

⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 500c 2-4.

as to transform the first-order desire on the basis of a certain universal principle of conduct.

Where exactly then is the seriously restrictive point in this conception of morality?

A central lacuna inherent in the liberal framework of modern moral theory is its failure to ensure that, *where there is no strong evaluation there is no moral personhood*. Given the procedural criteria of moral action, liberal morality only requires an agent to do actions merely on the basis of what Taylor calls "weak evaluation". Therefore, it cannot satisfy the condition of being a moral person. For what matters in this moral framework is that the agent acts solely in accordance with the principles of procedural justice, whether that of consequentialist maximization of utility or of deontological sanction of goodwill.

The issue at hand is that a person in the liberal moral theory is a simple weigher of desires. This phenomenon of being a simple weigher of desires is particularly glaring in utilitarianism. Taylor specifically draws our attention to how the utilitarian strand of liberal moral theory induces us to evaluate our desires in non-contrastive terms. A committed utilitarian strives to *quantify* desires and at the most indulges in plain calculation of consequences of desires to overcome *incompatible contingency*, while remaining oblivious of the need to *classify* desires. However, that

does not imply that a utilitarian is not reflective. He does subject his desires to reflective evaluation and, at times, succeed in acting against immediate, first-order desire. But the crucial point here is that the utilitarian-type of evaluative language is seriously flawed or deficient precisely on the moral score. For it lacks any qualitatively contrastive vocabulary, without which there can be no moral evaluative language.

The proper language of moral evaluation must contain terms or concepts of qualitative classification of alternative desires and dispositions. In other words, the truly moral person is a strong evaluator who envisages his alternative desires and courses of action in what Taylor calls "a vocabulary of worth."⁷

To elucidate the character of the language of the strong evaluator, we may attend to what Taylor says:

The desirable is not only defined for him by what he desires, or what he desires plus a calculation of consequences; it is also defined by a qualitative characterization of desires as higher and lower, noble and base, and so on. Where it is not a calculation of consequences, reflection is not just a matter of registering the conclusion that alternative A is more attractive to me, or draws me more than B. Rather the higher desirability of A over B is something I can articulate if I am reflecting a strong evaluator. I have a vocabulary of worth.⁸

⁷ "Responsibility for Self", p. 116.

⁸ *Ibid.*.

Thus, the utilitarian stance restricts the domain of "desirable" to a homogeneous medium. And that restrictive stance affects the act of *self-interpretation*. That is to say, in a homogeneous medium the act of self-interpretation is non-qualitative and non-contrastive. A simple weigher of desires, in that medium, evaluates his desires merely in terms of circumstantial and contingent support. He seeks the maximum consummation of desires. For him this is a criterion of right action. For example, a person may reject his desire to have ice-cream, but he does so only in order to entertain his (other) desire not to miss lunch and, of course, to have ice-cream later as well.

Weak evaluation has a morally counterintuitive implication in so far as it renders the act of self-interpretation non-qualitative and non-contrastive. For qualitative and contrastive self-interpretation is essential to moral personhood. It is only by way of qualitative contrast that a person, while attaching meaning to himself, learns to articulate the superiority of an alternative over another by ascribing values to desires as worthier or nobler etc. In so desiring to pursue a course of action considered to be of superior value, the agent interprets himself as a person living a worthy or noble life.

Such a life of contrastive evaluation is tantamount to an evaluative passage involving the continued examination of different

possible modes of life. Hence the question whether to continue with a given desire, or to withdraw it, does not end at its possible consummation. Rather the question is held to have direct bearing upon the quality of life that the person wants to live. Such a person is not disposed to treat the question of any desire "as a merely quantitative question of more satisfaction."⁹ On the contrary, he is disposed to consider the question of evaluating a desire as having to do with the formation of the *desire to grow* out of what is perceived as craven impulses.

This criticism, leveled against the utilitarian strand of liberal morality, might appear to be inappropriate to the deontological strand of Kantian liberal morality. For deontological Kantianism seems to be immune to such a criticism in so far as it rejects the utilitarian conception of a homogeneous medium of rational calculation. This rejection is based upon a crucial distinction that Kant explicitly makes between motives. It is the distinction between the desire for happiness on the one hand, and the respect for the moral law on the other. What this distinction enables Kant to do is to isolate actions done out of inclination from those done as duty, and thereby to signify the latter alone as truly moral. Given this distinction, it does appear as though Kantianism clearly draws out the morality of an action on a distinctively qualitative ground, deemed as a ground for strong evaluation.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Notwithstanding the significant anti-utilitarian criterion of morality in Kantianism and its apparent satisfaction of the condition of qualitative evaluation, Kantianism is not really free from the criticism in question. There is no room for qualitative and contrastive evaluation of desires or courses of action in Kantianism. For Kant relates the distinction between inclination-based action and duty-based action to the quality of the will alone. Indeed, Kant rejects those qualitative distinctions which are based upon any order of human nature or the order of the cosmos as coming under the purview of the moral.¹⁰ Consequently, there is no room in Kant for *substantive* qualitative and contrastive evaluation and self-interpretation. Mere allusion to the good will and reverence for the moral law amounts to a non-substantive or formal criterion. And the irrelevance of the order of human nature or the cosmic order to moral personhood inevitably rules out the projection of modes of life in tune with qualitatively higher visions of life.

The fall-out of the Kantian stance is twofold. On the one hand, it leads to the rejection of all distinctions whatsoever in the course of celebrating liberal freedom; on the other, it urges us to concentrate only upon the principles or standards which guide action. The point is illuminatingly summarized by Taylor:

Contemporary philosophers, even when they descend from Kant rather than Bentham (e.g., John Rawls), share this focus.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 83.

Moral philosophy should concern itself with determining the principles of our action. Or where it sees itself in a strictly "meta-ethical" role, it should concern itself with the language in which we determine extra-philosophically the principles of our action. Its starting point should be our intuitions about what actions are right (Rawls), or some general theory about what morality is, conceived in prescriptive, i.e., action-guiding, terms (Hare). The idea that moral thought should concern itself with our different visions of the qualitatively higher, with strong goods, is never even mooted.¹¹

5.3 Implications of Minimalism

Since the liberal moral theory takes the question "which moral acts are we to perform?" to be its central concern, it inevitably pays scant attention to the need of a moral person for contrastive self-evaluation as a necessary mode of living a qualitatively worthy life. Indeed, there is something paradoxical in the very structure of the theory. For, although the question, "what ought / to do?", is agent-specific, no agent-specific answer would be regarded as morally justified unless the preferred answer instantiates some rule or principle of right action.¹² What this means, in effect, is that the agent's specific identity gets not only neglected but entirely dissipated. What is more, basic moral judgments are required to be universal in form in that they should contain no essential reference to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹² It is so because the liberal moral theory regards judgments about the rightness (or wrongness) as basic. Further on, the basic judgments take the form of rules or principles of right action. For it is believed that particular judgments having reference to particular persons must always be instances of rules and principles of right action.

particular persons or particular relationships in which the agent may stand. As a result, the person is almost written off the scene. For what counts is the action - whether the given act in a given situation is right or wrong. It is the "faceless" agent that remains in the scene. Here we may refer to Joel Kupperman's apt remark:

Despite the opposition between Kantians and consequentialists, it is easy for someone who is reading some of the works of either to get the picture of an essentially faceless ethical agent who is equipped by theory to make moral choices that lack psychological connection with either the agent's past or future.¹³

In saying that the moral agent does not *really* count, our argument is not that, within the liberal framework, there is no moral agent *per se*. What we are trying to argue against is the abstract identity of the moral agent. The moral agent appears as the "antecedently individuated self" who is "abstracted from-social-order" and that, we wish to maintain, fails to accord with our actual moral practices

Furthermore, the moral rules that enjoin obligatory actions on Kantian or consequentialist framework, though succeed in guiding our conduct, their reach to ethically problematic situations is rather narrow. In many instances they are found wanting. They do not have the range or

¹³ "Character and Ethical Theory", p. 116.

the strength to cover the cases that involve feelings, attitudes, policies, and the life plans of the people. Noting these limitations, Kupperman says:

A moral rule to the effect of "Do not hurt other people" or "Do not damage other people's lives," while acceptable to both Kantians and consequentialists, is unlikely to carry us very far toward noticing the ways in which our actions might cause psychological harm to others or to ourselves. It simply is easier, in the general run of cases, to be aware that something would count as stealing or killing than to be aware that something would count as damaging another person's life.¹⁴

The limitations of rules or principles of liberal morality owe to the rationalist perception of the function of a normative theory. The rationalist, as Clarke points out, requires

a normative theory to provide explicit principles systematized so as to allow a procedure for deducing the morally correct answer in every case. The principles must be explicit in the sense that whatever meaning is relevant to their justificatory role is literally expressed or directly implied by that expression.¹⁵

Thus, in the rationalist view the role or the function of a normative theory is procedural. That is to say, it involves the observance of a

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁵ "Anti-Theory in Ethics", p. 237.

certain style, method, or procedure of thought.¹⁶ The exactness, precision and rigor that the rationalist liberal moralities theoretically require of their rules¹⁷ does not sit well with the actual phenomenology of moral experience and situations. "Moral situations" are usually not of such cut and dry nature that admit of unconditional application of rules such as "Do not kill" or "Do not steal".

The moral agent encounters situations which are often vague and laden with conflicting moral demands and therefore, are not as exclusive as the semantic features of moral rules demand.¹⁸ Moral norms always get interpreted through cultural practices. But the liberal moralists assign definite and exclusive meaning to these norms so as to deduce from them particular moral judgments. Such a lack of attunement of moral principles or rules to the undulating nuances of actual moral life is a serious lacuna in liberal morality.

In their zeal for exactness and formalistic considerations, the liberal moralist is unable to capture the rich complexity of moral experience. In their view, there is always a single and definitive solution to any moral problem. This implies that there is no irresolvable moral conflict and no genuine moral dilemma. Hence, there is no scope for genuine regret. If at all there is to be a sense of regret, it would be in the case of the agent's

¹⁶ It reaffirms Taylor's contention that we have alluded to above in Chapter Three.

¹⁷ Clarke, "Anti-Theory in Ethics", p. 238.

¹⁸ Baier, *Postures of the Mind*, pp. 273-74.

being unsure of what he did was right.¹⁹

But such a straightjacketed account of a moral problem and its solution does not seem to conform to actual moral situations. More often than not, an agent is under the pressure of multiple conflicting norms, and his acting on one of the norms does not erase the demands of other norms not acted upon. For example, one may be torn between the obligation to one's ailing parents and responsibility to provide for the education of his children. Inevitably, his sincere fulfillment of one of the commitments would still leave a morally sensitive person remorseful of not having been able to fulfill the other. And it cannot be gainsaid that to feel remorse or regret or guilt "is the characteristic first-personal reaction within the system, and if an agent never felt such sentiments, he would not belong to the morality system or be a full moral agent in its terms."²⁰

Another limitation of the liberal moral point of view is exemplified in their treatment of virtues. Virtues are, in this view, dispositions to behave in accordance with certain moral principles which are justifiable on independent grounds. For example, the virtue of honesty disposes the agent to follow the principle of truth-telling. But truthfulness as a norm does not receive its justification from the virtue of honesty. Rather, it gets its justification from its conformity to some universal principle of conduct.

¹⁹ McConnell, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency in Ethics", p. 281.

²⁰ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 177.

Hence, the virtue receives its moral approval from the moral quality of the norm of truthfulness it is attached to. Virtues are thus made out to be instrumentally subservient to the universal moral principles of conduct.

The liberal account of the virtue is flawed because of its failure to recognize the point that, unlike other dispositions, virtuous dispositions are *unique*. The uniqueness of a virtuous disposition consists in the fact that, unlike other dispositions, the justification of virtuous dispositions is *internal* to the disposition itself. The justificatory content of a virtuous disposition is intrinsic to or *inside* the disposition. And any conduct, whether successful or failed, that flows from the disposition, is justified by that very disposition. This is why, one might say that the justification of a virtuous action is *inside-out* justification. It means that the action *out* there is justified by the quality that resides *inside* the disposition.

Further still, given the liberal conception of disengaged reason and procedural rationality, there is no adequate place for the vision or telos of a good life. For this form of rationality, which is fully involved in the search for, and the formulation of universal principles of conduct, is inherently unsuitable to the delineation of an ideal form of human existence. Hence, it cannot accommodate the need to link moral actions with any axiological telos of human life.

In the absence of any axiological telos in the scheme of human life,

there cannot be any idea of a *qualitative transformation* of life. Within this scheme, human beings are simply supposed to sustain their "ordinary life", which is "the life of production and reproduction, or economic and family life".²¹

But such a life is obviously impoverished to accommodate the idea of moral personhood. Here we may appropriately allude to the Aristotelian distinction between "life and the good life". For Aristotle, life as such provides the infrastructure needed to sustain the good life. And what he calls the "the good life" means the life of qualitatively higher activities. It is only by drawing such a distinction that one can develop a conception of life that incorporates the possibility of qualitative transformation.

5.4 The Thread of a Good Life

The conception of moral personhood that we are advocating is built around a certain configuration of an ideal form of human existence. That configuration in turn provides the requisite background against which humans make sense of their desires, feelings, dispositions, attitudes and actions. And making sense of these states and dispositions ultimately amounts to making sense of a good life.

²¹ Taylor, "Justice After Virtue", p. 31. He also discusses this aspect of ordinary life in *Sources of the Self*.

The course of a good life is at once reflective and transformative. Our desires and dispositions, feelings and other attitudes, are all subjected to reflective evaluation. Reflective self-evaluation acts as a motivation for self-transformation. Certain existing desires and dispositions are rejected as unworthy of being part of a good life. Certain other, presently non-existent, desires are conceived of as worth of having as the actual motives of action. Ideally, it is these valued desires that we try to develop within us, so that they actually dispose us to act appropriately and to become good persons. Thus, our personhood is the product of our continued and sustained engagement in a self-transformative and self-developmental task. A person bent on living a good life does not merely live a life of strongly evaluated discrete desires and actions. Rather he gives his life an orientation towards a certain meaningful goal, and this orientation is that of the continuity of valued dispositions, so that the life constitutes a meaningful whole with a sustainable direction. The central issue of such a person is not just where he *is*, but where he is actually *going*.

To realize the need of a goal-directed continuity is to understand that human actions are not mere bodily movements. In order for bodily movements to count as actions we must relate those movements to intentions, desires and goals of the person whose

movements they are.²²

However, if we are to make sense of these action-explanatory intentions, what we would have to do is, as MacIntyre says, place them in a setting. For example, an action of a person to cast his vote may be rendered intelligible by explaining his intention to participate in the democratic exercise to elect a worthy representative to the lower house of the parliament. Or his action could be the result of an intention to please his boss whose relative is contesting the election. Now in the former case, the action is related to a setting of democratic system and in the latter to an administrative hierarchy.

Of course, any action or a piece of behavior may relate to more than one setting. As in the example stated above, casting a vote could be embedded in both of the settings invoked by our explanations of it. And in the event of multiple settings, if we wish to know what exactly has prompted the person to act, then we have to find out which setting holds primacy for him. Would he be still interested in casting his vote in favor of the same candidate in case he happens to know that the candidate in question is a corrupt man? In other words, we need to identify his short-term intentions about casting a vote and their relation to one another and their relation to

²² We may note here that even when we say that what was done was unintentional we adopt the same route.

literary forms. Events ranging from careers, marriages, chess-games, court rooms are all capable of having dramatic shape. "They embody reversals and recognitions. They move towards and away from climaxes. There may within a longer conversation be digressions and subplots, indeed digressions within digressions and subplots within subplots."²⁵ They belong to genres (the tragic, the comic, the farcical). And in the absence of such patterning human actions become alienating and unintelligible. As MacIntyre says, "In each case the act ... become intelligible by finding its place in a narrative."²⁶

Given that the actions of the person are embedded in a socio-historical context, his life is an enacted narrative in which he is both a character and an author. However, the person is not a sovereign author. He is a subordinate character in the dramas of others. The settings in which his actions take place acquire shapes in ways beyond his control, and then the future remains largely unpredictable. But, for all that, the narrative form of his life gives it a certain teleological character.²⁷

Now we come to the crucial point: The person's sense of the good, of qualitative distinctions, has to be woven into his understanding of his life as an unfolding story. In other words, the orientation of the person to evaluate his actions through qualitative distinctions has to be preceded by

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-01.

an understanding of his *situatedness*. The understanding of the narrative form of his life enables him to place himself in relation to the goods and to see whether he is in contact with those or not. It enables him to see whether he is rightly placed with respect to them. In fact, this capacity is what determines the worth of his life - that is, to what extent his situatedness manifests and embodies the resultant goods of qualitative distinctions.

Thus, a worthy human life must be a life that has a place within a coherent narrative form. In other words, the concepts of orientation towards the good and of the narrative unity of a life are internally related. Focusing on this internal relation, Taylor contends that

we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest'. But one could perhaps start from another point: because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story. From whichever direction, I see these conditions as connected facets of the same reality, inescapable structural requirements of human agency.²⁸

Thus, the narrative understanding of life is an understanding of life in terms of connections between human actions and the ends of action qua

²⁸ *Sources of the Self*, pp. 51-2.

good and evil, virtue and vice. A narrative self-understanding enables the person to better identify his motives, intentions and purposes in respect of the improved vision of life. And, of course, the improved vision of life in turn influences the person to seek narrative unity of greater significance in his life. Indeed, it is the quest for narrative unity in life that assumes the character of a moral striving towards the good. The orientation towards the good is realized through and sustained by, the narrative quest of life.

While responding to the critical remark of MacIntyre,²⁹ on *Sources of the Self* that there is no identifiable criterion to resolve conflict amongst various goods, Taylor maintains that moral practical reasoning directed at "particular positions or sensibilities" is already adequate to resolve any such conflict.³⁰ But one may ask, What does Taylor mean by goods? To which he responds:

I have been speaking of the good ... meaning whatever is picked out as incomparably higher in a qualitative distinction. It can be some action, or motive, or style of life, which is seen as qualitatively superior. 'Good' is used here in a highly general sense, designating anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable, of whatever kind or category.³¹

²⁹ "Critical remarks on the Sources of the Self by Charles Taylor," pp. 187-88.

³⁰ "Reply to Commentators," p. 204.

³¹ *Sources of the Self*, p. 92.

What Taylor indicates here is that there are as many goods, of any category, as there are items of value or worthiness. From this he wants to maintain that different lives can be different strands of narrative unity containing incompatible goods. Consequently, the final ends towards which the respective strands of narrative quest are directed would be incompatible with one another. The point, therefore, is that there is no such thing as *the* good as the final end of any worthy human life. There can at most be what Taylor calls the "hypergoods".

We wish to disagree on this point of Taylor. We may agree with Taylor that, when there is a situation of conflict between two incompatible and competing goods, moral reasoning has the adequacy for resolving the conflict. But, in such a situation, moral reasoning must draw upon something in order to determine a decisive criterion for the resolution of the conflict. Our claim is that, in the absence of an *overarching* good, accepted as the *telos* of life, moral reasoning has hardly anything to draw upon to obtain the required criterion. And there is no point in suggesting that hypergoods can provide the decisive criterion. For hypergoods themselves may be in conflict with one another.

Our claim, therefore, is that the harmonious life of narrative unity must be understood as a narrative quest guided and governed by some overarching good. It is only when a life is shaped by such a narrative quest that the life becomes a continuous and well-integrated striving for

worthy human existence.

5.5 Selflessness

Thus far we have been arguing that the attainment of the ideal of moral personhood provides meaning to and purpose of moral striving. However, a question yet to be raised is whether the conditions of moral personhood that have been discussed thus far, though necessary, are sufficient as well. The answer to this question lies in a still deeper understanding of what it is for a person to be a value-sensitive rational being striving to become a moral person. More specifically, the question is directed at the *nature* of the person who attains the *moral status* in the true sense of the term. We are to specify the moral nature of the person in the sense that the person's unflinching pursuit of higher-order desires, values and goods is, as it were, anchored to an *inner perspective* that decisively determines the moral character of the pursuit. The inner perspective has to be, intrinsically, the perspective of the moral self. It is an attitudinal perspective which forms the unique self that underlies moral personhood. To be such a self, which can be available only upon adopting that attitudinal perspective, is therefore, a fundamental condition of moral personhood.

This fundamental condition, conceived of as the adoption of the inner perspective, is that of *selflessness* - the maximal freedom from selfishness or egotism. The limit of moral personhood is, ultimately,

complete freedom from ego-centricity. True morality has a kind of inner transparency, which is the transparency of motivation on the part of the moral agent. Egocentric or egotistical motivation is counter-moral because, more often than not, the ego distorts our perception of human reality and our personal relations with others.³²

While the above remarks on the counter-morality of egotistical motivations might appear platitudinous, their implications are nevertheless of considerable significance. That significance can be articulated by reference to the practice of qualitative discrimination in the context of choosing amongst various modes of life. Qualitative discriminations, in the form of strong evaluation, ultimately concern the problem of the ego. When a particular mode of life is chosen on the basis of its qualitative preference over an alternative mode of life, the alternative may be discredited precisely because it is perceived to give expression to counter-moral motivations. The discredited life or action is perceived to be linked to ego-centric motivations. That mode of life or action is discredited because the egotistical motivations that underpin that possible course of life or action is denigrated.

A person's moral striving essentially involves strong evaluation of his desires and courses of action. When any lower-order desire is the target of morally relevant higher-order desire, the higher-order attitude aims at the

³² Miri, "On Knowing Another Person", p. 9.

target-desire with a view to undercutting the ego-centric support that sustains this desire. A life of strong evaluation is thus supposed to be motivationally strong enough to overcome the forces of selfishness. In other words, a life guided by strong evaluation is qualitatively superior to a life led on the basis of weak evaluation; the former is a "larger" life compared to the "narrow" life of the latter. The latter mode of life is narrow because in it the agent is concerned merely with gaining immediate and contingent advantages of the satisfaction of ego-centric desires.

What has been said above in abstract terms may be made clearer by a concrete illustration of an actual life that is deservingly an exemplar. Take a particular incident in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. It is the incident in which, when he was boarding an upper class compartment in a train in South Africa, he was pushed out of the train by the railway authority just because he was a "colored" man. While having to spend a cold winter night in the waiting room of the station, Gandhi pondered over the condition he found himself in. In his own words:

I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India after finishing the case? It would be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial - only a symptom of the deep disease of color prejudice. I should try, if possible to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for

the removal of the color prejudice.³³

The autobiographical remarks can be construed as a practical example of reflective self-evaluation. There is an initial consideration of alternative desire set against a pro-attitude towards what he takes to be his duty. The first-order desire that he rejects on qualitative grounds is the selfish desire to escape the hardships of an uncompromising and confrontationist life in South Africa by returning to India. His attitude towards the course of action that he envisages as his duty is a higher-order attitude towards a selfless life of relentless struggle aimed at the end of apartheid. Clearly, his evaluation favors a higher mode of life that exhorts him to shun any alternative mode of life that gives expression to desires constitutive of self-centered motivations.

5.5.1 Tradition and Its Wisdom

Selflessness, or freedom from ego-centricity, is criterial of a mode of life or a course of action being moral. Therefore, the motivational constitution of a moral person is purged of desires and interests which impede the extension of personal consciousness towards larger humanity. The virtuous life of a person, whether that of courage, nobility, justice, kindness, humility, forgiveness, truthfulness, is a life marked by such ego-transcending personal consciousness that reaches out to humanity at large. A virtuous life has a symmetrical relation with a life defined in

³³ Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, p. 82.

terms of certain range of ethically significant values, such as respect for life, integrity, order and well-being. Strong (self-)evaluation involves a deep concern for these values. Our commitment to these values make possible for us to live a virtuous life - that is a just and truthful life formed as a coherent narrative unity.

So deeply are these values entrenched in us humans that we are tempted to think of them as instinctively rooted in us. These are woven into the human social fabric, and they constitute the *moral texture* of that fabric. But what exactly is the source of these values? What exactly is the repository of human values which govern our strong (self-)evaluation?

The places where we are to look at in search of these values are literature, history, religion, philosophy and other areas of human studies. But most importantly we are to draw our attention to those exemplars whose lives embody, and give illustrious expression to, these values. Together, these multitudinous sources constitute what we may call the *wisdom of a tradition*. The wisdom of a tradition (or traditions) constitutes the repository of values.

A question that can pertinently be raised here is why some people become the exemplars of the wisdom of a tradition. What, in other words, crucially underlies the ability of these few people to be the incarnations of the core values of the wisdom of a tradition? And what is it that centrally

accounts for the possibility of a Buddha or a Mahavira, a Gandhi or a Mother Teresa, in the midst of humanity?

The answer to this question is available within the very idea of the wisdom of a tradition. Any tradition is a tradition of wisdom not just because it is rich in core human values, but because it speaks of certain deep truths about personal consciousness. What lends a tradition the mark of wisdom is what it tells us about the deep nature and profound potentiality of the human self. The story of the wisdom of a tradition at its core is the story of the human self, or consciousness, as capable of a transcendence of enormous magnitude. The self is projected as capable of becoming selfless - where selflessness means a complete overcoming of the ego that we naturally find within us. Personal consciousness is thereby transformed into impersonal, universal consciousness.

Evidently, such a transformative capacity is *spiritual* in essence rather than a merely rational or cognitive ability. That is why the wisdom of a tradition is characterized as tradition's spiritual wisdom. Selflessness is therefore a spiritual value. But it can also be said to be a *spiritual virtue* of an overriding nature. That is to say, a virtuous life is truly virtuous in that such a life satisfies the spiritual condition of transcendence of the ego.

Exemplars of the wisdom of a tradition inherit, and are inspired by, the spiritual core of the tradition. And they acquire the rare distinction of

being morally excellent human agents precisely because the lives they lead, the courses of action they undertake in the social world, are anchored to the inner perspective of motivational transparency - that is the perspective of selflessness.

At this stage one may ask: How does a Gandhi or a Mother Teresa, whom we have illustrated as exemplars of moral striving, relate himself or herself to another person? What would be a plausible description of the mode of relation between such a moral person and other persons in society or the world? Here we can invoke the wisdom of a particular metaphysical tradition in the characterization of this relation.

In an article entitled "The Training of the Vedantin" M. Hiriyanna provides a graphic illustration of the attitudinal change that a person under Vedantic training undergoes. Hiriyanna talks about the idea of a circle the center point of which is equidistant from any point on the circumference. Imagining other people to be positioned at the points of the circumference, the person receiving Vedantic training is inspired to position himself at the center of the circle and thereby to conceive of his relation to other persons all equidistantly placed in relation to himself.³⁴ To be so related to everybody else is, in effect, to attain the attitudinal impersonality of a universal self. It is to shake off the ego-centric partiality that characterizes our usual attitudinal stance towards one another.

³⁴ "The Training of the Vedantin", p. 10.

5.6 General Remarks

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that the liberal conception of moral personhood is inadequate, both structurally and constitutively, to accommodate the idea of the moral person as a person *as such*, structured by a narrative unity and set to the attainment of the end of a worthy human life. In the liberal framework, the moral life of a person cannot be a *comprehensive* life, because the discrete life-episodes in which particular moral situations, or situations of moral obligation, are said to arise, do not add up to a life in the comprehensive sense. What we have tried to argue in this discussion is that a satisfactory theory of moral personhood must show the moral life of a person as integrated into the person's overall life woven into the fabric of a single narrative.

We believe that a virtue-theoretic account of moral personhood, shaped by the central idea of enduring moral striving and the related idea of a moral life forming a teleologically structured narrative unity, which we have tried to develop in this thesis, fulfills the demand of a satisfactory theory. The thrust of the theory provided by us is that the life of a moral person is a comprehensive life. The moral life is not a *part* of life, howsoever, significant the part may be deemed to be. Rather, the moral life is what it *means* for a total life to be significant.

Conclusion

This study is inspired by an issue of principal importance in any discussion of moral theory. It is the issue of the relation between morality and life. What kind of relation between morality and life is right or wrong? Our discussion has shown that the kind of relation that liberal moral theory projects is wrong. The reasons why it is wrong are mainly two. First, the liberal theory fragmentizes life into the moral and the so-called non-moral parts, and thereby leaves no room for making morality integral to the seamless whole of life. Second, given the above fragmentation, there can be no satisfactory account of moral personhood. For the liberal moral person, whose moral life is isolated from and disrupted by the non-moral course of life, cannot engage in continuous moral striving.

We have also seen clearly that the person's moral course of life in the liberal theory is discontinuous in the overall course of his life. The moral self of such a person is autonomous of the non-moral dimension of life. And what forms the essential nature of the moral self or agent is its alleged freedom of the will to choose those ends which are expressive of the person's self-interest. His ego-centric rationality guides his freedom of choice and shapes his individuality in a social world of mutually

disinterested individuals. The society of people becomes an artificial network of human relation suited to the pursuit of one's self-chosen ends.

There is something morally inimical to the idea of individuals, who are mutually disinterested, or essentially self-interested, entering into a social world from the outside, as it were, and living with one another only under the motivations of individual expediency and convenience. For there is something morally reprehensible about the idea of a human person who is inexorably conditioned by self-interest, and condemned to self-interested relation to others in society. Hence, individualism as a theoretic position of liberalism has been found to be morally counter-intuitive.

If individualism is morally counter-intuitive, so is its cognate idea of freedom of choice which is sustained by ego-centric rationality. For such a rational agent indulges in decision-making in formal and procedural terms. Different strands of liberal moral theory theorize on the morality of the individual's decisions with exclusive regard to matters of consistency, social contract or aggregate happiness.

But these universal principles of consistency, social contract and aggregate happiness are found to be non-substantive and non-qualitative criteria for the choice of life-ends.

When the individual is left to its freedom of choice entirely under the guidance of non-substantive or formal principles of conduct, he has to confront a social predicament which he must overcome in procedural terms. He first understands the *moral* constraint of having to acknowledge that while he himself has the right to freedom of choice from the vantage-point of his self-interest, there are other individuals who are equally free and legitimate claimants of the same right. Thus, the liberal moral theory devises a bridge between the individual's self-interest on the one hand and his moral concern for the interests of other people on the other.

We have noted that the liberal theorists define the paradigms of moral concern mostly within the ambit of clash of interests. This is why, their emphasis lies on the *content of obligation* rather than on the *nature of good life*. While arguing for a bridge, liberals always seem to assure the individual that his self-interest will be protected. Simultaneously, however, they try to devise formal methods, rooted in the conditions of consistency and impersonality, to bring him on the board to take note of others' interests as well.

In the liberal moral set up, therefore, where there is no conflict of public interest, there is no moral life or a life of obligation. And if there is any such situation of conflict, universally prescribed rules are to be obeyed so that the individual can secure his self-interest in the long run.

Less of conflict means, less of obligatory situations, such that the individual has a fairly spacious private sector of life which is non-obligatory or free from the moral demands of the public life. Life within the private, non-moral, sector is free to give vent to individual preferences and the gratification of desires, howsoever idiosyncratic these may be. In private life one can go on a moral holiday, as it were, and the individual need not have any qualms about turning this life into a playground for mindless diversions from the constraints of public morality.

We have reiterated the point that the fragmentation of human life into the moral and the non-moral, the public and the private, affects the narrative unity of a whole life. More centrally, we have expressed our strong suspicion that letting morality an isolated place in the overall scheme of a human life, and thereby leaving the other, private, space for the individual's non-moral freedom of choice of desires and preferences, is most likely to affect the attainment of a good or worthy life. At worst, this bifurcation of life into the private and the public might prove to be schizophrenic. Someone may turn his private life into a world of mindless fantasy and entirely value-indifferent pursuits of pleasure. And to say that the morality of such a person remains intact because in his public life he manages to stick to his obligations without exception is, we believe, morally counter-intuitive. For such a schizophrenic life strongly smacks of worthlessness.

We have maintained throughout the thesis that the liberal theorist's description of the actual position of the moral person in the larger social situation is a serious misconstrual. In the liberal moral framework the person is condemned to find himself in an ego-centric predicament. This predicament is inevitable consequence of regarding each person to be essentially self-interested and also to remain so in the long run. Morality then becomes a pragmatic-instrumental device for securing one's own self-interest without thereby affecting the security of others' self-interest. And mutual disinterestedness remains as an invariant attitude throughout the person's moral intercourse with other persons in the social world. But it is this peculiarity of morality's compromise with self-interest or mutual disinterestedness, founded upon ego-centric rationality and unsituated rational freedom, that we consider to be a mistaken picturization of the moral person.

The alleged concurrence of moral striving with the motivation for self-interest even in long-term ends of life is really hard to understand from the moral point of view. And taking recourse to the favored liberal idea of "enlightened self-interest" is no respite indeed. For what is so good about that "enlightenment" which cannot overcome the ego-centricity of self-interest?

Our strategy in the thesis has been to argue for an alternative theoretical stance towards moral personhood by reference to the illustration

of exemplars of moral humanity such as Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa. When we set a Gandhian moral person against the Hobbesian-Rawlsian moral agent, the central difference that becomes apparent is that, unlike the moral agent of liberal individualism, the Gandhian person does not encounter the social world with an acute sense of an ego-centric predicament. In the Gandhian alternative standpoint, the process of circumventing the counter-moral forces of ego-centricity is set on as early as the person begins to set his foot on the path of moral striving. Reflective self-evaluation incorporates the injunction that the life of qualitatively higher desires must also be a life of least self-interest. Only then is such a life well-regulated, well-directed and worthwhile.

It is in view of this alternative vision of the moral self as the underlying self of a truly moral person that we have emphasized the attitude of egolessness or selflessness. We have treated the condition of inner motivational transparency as uniquely fundamental to moral personhood, and have regarded it as a unique *virtue*. Given the virtue of selflessness as a moral necessity and moral motivation, and given the conception of an overall worthwhile life that does not bifurcate life into two distinct sectors, moral and non-moral, public and private, the integral life of a moral person assumes a quite different narrative shape and unity. It is a narrative of moral wisdom, a narrative of virtuous engagement in a course of life not disrupted by for any dubious freedom for private fantasy and gratification. And moral wisdom has an implication of lasting

value, namely that it is not human *individualism*, but human *universalism* (which is the ethical correlate of selflessness), that underpins the formation of moral personhood.

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